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Grimoire

La Salle University

Volume 28, Spring 1996



Grimoire

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From the Editor:

Welcome to the Spring '96 edition of *Grimoire*. At last we had a semester that didn't seem too frantic or rushed. With an earlier submission deadline, a new and wonderfully fast computer, and (at last) an actual DTP staff to help out and order around, this semester was much more fun and relaxed than usual. Unfortunately, the fun must come to an end since this is my last semester as Managing Editor/Desktop Publishing Editor. I cannot express how valuable an experience this has been for me.



Sad as it is, I'm happy to be passing *Grimoire* down to an energetic and creative young staff. I would like to thank Christine Schilling, Ray Bossert, and Kathleen Suchecki for helping out so much and assuring me that *Grimoire* production will not be total chaos next year. It was also nice to have company for a change—thanks for all the entertainment, Ray. Good luck guys—you have a lot of hardships (I guarantee the computer will crash on you at least a dozen times) and fun ahead of all of you, and it will all be worth it.

And thanks to Joe Cieplinski—I realize that you had an insanely busy semester, but I knew I could count on you in the end. I felt like I had some tough shoes to fill as Editor, but knowing you were just a phone call away made it easier. Thanks for your insight, your incredible eye for grammar mistakes, and, of course, the Nutter Butters.

And lastly...I guess I kept this thanks for last because it's the hardest. Doc, without you, none of this could have happened—not this semester nor the past 6 years that you have been at the heart of *Grimoire*. Your intelligence, your sarcastic wit, and your friendship will all be missed. I have no idea how you could ever be replaced. I do know that Joe and I owe you _____.

So, in honor of your last semester here at La Salle, I dedicate this semester's *Grimoire* to you, Dr. Toni Culjak, our wonderful advisor. I wish it could be more than just 62 pages (plus cover). You definitely deserve linen paper.

Managing Editor,

A handwritten signature of Lorraine Healy in cursive script.

Lorraine Healy

Grimoire

Slap your *Grimoire* on your lap,
And flip the book open, and hear its back crack.
See the runes in Latin and Greek
Which promise whatever powers you seek.
Read the scripted verses aloud,

and go soaring up among the clouds.
Feel the wind upon your face
as your mind rushes through aerial space?
Another cantation in the book of spells
Lets you pass safely through

that cave where dragons dwell
Or see what's due you
When you follow Italians through the nine hells.
And once you've left here with minimum harm,

Browse through the chapter on lovers' charms.
Transfigure your heart's desire into a goddess or Adonis,
And woo them into revealing the secrets of their bodice,
But pull back your hand when you feel the steam scalding
As passions materialize as fiery cauldrons!

Chant the next few stanzas and recline in green pastures
With flute-tooting fawns and nymphs clad in flowers,
Dancing under white and red skies,
Dancing under Bacchus' white and red wines.
And after you have had your last brimming toast,

Transcend the pastoral follies and hear angelic hosts
Proclaim Almighty God and sing of saintly ghosts.

Proceed through a slain hero's dirge,
And resurrect him with rhythmic words.

Philosophize the infinite,
what more truth can be known
Than when you flip through the spellbook's pages and recite the magic poem?

---A. *Raymond Bossert, III*

Recipe in Hue

She'd make a decent printmaker,
he tells her in their kitchen.
The wax
beans are soaking in the steel
sink, her mind clouds over
like steam from the kettle on the window
pane. She pictures herself soaking thick
fibrous paper in water, so the ink
will bed easily into it, plant-like, juice into the dish
sponge. Her sturdy wrist,

toughened from years
of iron pots, scraping melon
rinds, mashing dough
mounds, will dig
out thin little troughs
in the flat white wood

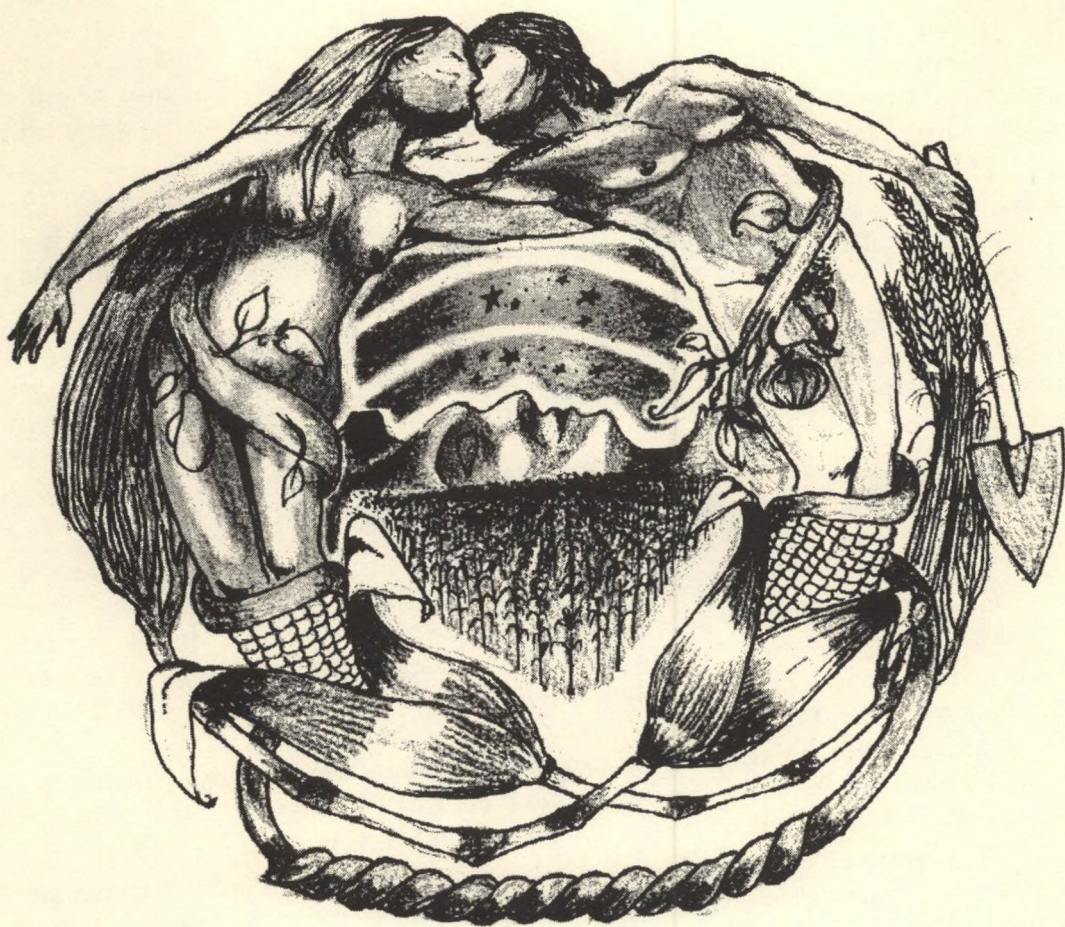
instead of paring potatoes, digging
out their eyes. For a minute
she imagines digging out her own eyes,
paring them with her little yellow
knife. Left blue, right blue

then rolling them in India
ink, purple, and dabbing
them on newsprint, hoping
to see where she should have been.

Now though, she is in the kitchen,
sliding a roast into an oven,
watching the hands
of the clock stand still.



---*Kathleen Suhecki*



Nacer del Choclo—Eduardo Villegas

RICKY ANTHONY

LORRAINE HEALY

"They usually didn't talk that much. Their relationship consisted mostly of her and Michele chasing him around the yard, trying to kiss him. It was different with just her and him, though."

Carrie woke up frightened. She looked around her room, searching for signs of anyone, anything, knowing that she wasn't alone. The man who had been chasing her must be there now; someone who had seemed that real couldn't exist solely in her dreams.

Her bedroom door wasn't shut tightly---a glimmer from the bathroom night-light across the hall shined through the crack. Carrie imagined a person, his bulky body all too familiar, walking in the hallway past her room, momentarily blocking the incoming light.

Carrie stifled the urge to call out for her mother. You're too old for that, her father would say, and he was right. She *was* old, almost ten, almost a *decade*. No longer could she call herself a little kid. She was going to have start acting her age. In only three years, she'd be a *teenager*.

Carrie did not call out for her mother. Instead, she brought her purple comforter up over her ears and tightly held Doodles, her stuffed dog.

It was summer and too hot to do anything except beg her friend Michele to have her over to her pool. But Michele had gotten annoyed a lot last summer because Carrie had always asked to go in her pool on hot days, so Carrie vowed to herself to try not to ask too often this year.

It was really hot, though. For the two minutes she had been upstairs that morning, she had broken out into a sweat, her tank top clinging to her back. But she did not know how much longer she could last hanging out in her fresh, cool basement.

"Why aren't you outside? It's beautiful out," her mother reminded her from the laundry room. Carrie was playing with her two Barbie dolls, trying to dress them in her latest creation of pink lace and army camouflage remnants. Mrs. O'Hare came out of the laundry room dressed in a white and blue T-shirt and light blue shorts which showed her tan, wrinkly knees. Carrie thought that her mother looked quite pretty that day, especially with her hair swept off her neck in a "French twist," as her mother called it.

"What's Michele doing today?" her mother asked, squatting down to get a closer look at Barbie's attire.

Carrie shrugged and then remembered that today was the day Michele was supposed to get her hair done. "Mrs. Mineo is taking her to get a perm."

Mrs. O'Hare's wrinkled brow showed her disapproval. "Isn't she a little young to be getting a perm?"

Carrie sighed. To her mother, everyone else's daughters were doing things too early for their age. "Ma, she's ten," she replied and rolled her eyes. She couldn't wait until her tenth birthday came next week so she could start throwing around the big numbers, too.

"Well. . . still. Maybe you should go over there when she gets home and tell her how nice she looks." And with that, her mother strolled back into the laundry room.

What her mother said had not been a suggestion, Carrie knew. She realized that if she didn't go over and compliment her friend about how good her hair looked, there'd be questions and comments from *both* her parents about how Carrie wasn't being a "good friend."

Michele looked like a poodle. The hairdresser had used an extremely tight setting, and now Michele's once wavy, dark brown hair was totally frizzed. Her older brother Tommy and his friend had already come through the Mineo's living room making barking noises.

Carrie took a seat on their leather couch and assured her friend that her hair looked fine and that it would loosen up in a couple of days, especially after she wet it. Michele nodded and took a seat on the floor to play with her dog, Dukie.

The Mineo's were a really Italian family that said words like "coolie" instead of heinie or butt and had plastic statues of the Virgin Mary in their garden. Mrs. Mineo's parents were "straight off the boat," and Carrie could barely understand what Mr. Dellacono said sometimes. It didn't help that he was mostly deaf, either.

"Oh yeah," Michele said, putting her hair up into a ponytail. "I can't go in the pool 'cause of the chlorine."

Can't go in the pool? Carrie's stomach sank. Suddenly all thoughts of going back outside into that heat with her butt sticking to her plastic bicycle seat and her feet swelling in her Keds made her cringe.

"For how long?" she asked, trying not to appear too concerned. When Mrs. Mineo replied three days, Carrie began to wonder if it would be possible for her parents to buy and build a swimming pool in the next two.

Carrie waved goodbye to Michele as she rode off on her bike. It was only five o'clock, but Michele's family ate early on Sundays. Carrie ate at pretty much the same time every night---6:30. Her mom wanted her home at six o'clock on the dot---no exceptions.

Riding past her own house, Carrie prayed a family member didn't see her. Her brother Paul wasn't too bad, but her other brother Barry tended to act like her third parent, probably because he was ten years older than she. Both of her brothers had shocks of red hair which would make them easy to spot as she pedaled by. There was no sign of them or her parents, though, so Carrie continued on.

Carrie's destination was her friend Ricky Anthony's house. He was nice, and she liked him because he didn't mind playing with girls. In fact, when given the choice, Ricky Anthony was found playing tag with the girls more often than playing kickball with the boys. Despite his sometimes girlish behavior, though, Carrie's parents still didn't want her playing with boys.

Like just last summer, for instance, she had gone into Michele's older brother's room since it had just gotten redone. They had turned the garage into a room for him. She and Michele had wound up hanging out in there, talking to her brother Tommy and his friend Mike. It was cool; the boys were three years older than the girls, but they still talked with them. At one point, Tommy started horsing around with Carrie and had ripped the sleeve of her dress a little. She wasn't too worried; it had been on the seam and her mother was an excellent seamstress.

When she had gone home to show her mother what had happened, though, her parents flipped out. They were upset that she had been in a boy's room. Carrie tried to convince them that they had been just playing, but the look in her father's eyes told her that he felt something much more serious had been going on.

This really confused Carrie sometimes. She knew about sex---her friend Carly had an older sister who told her everything she wanted to know. Carly then in turn told Carrie all that she had been told, sometimes more than enough. So, contrary to what her parents thought, Carrie wasn't innocent about what boys and girls did together. But since she didn't know anything, according to them, then why did they worry so much about her? It wasn't like she wanted to do any of those things---she didn't even know what a boy's thingy looked like; she was happy just to get a kiss or hold hands.

All these thoughts ran through Carrie's head as she headed for Ricky Anthony's. She hoped that he was out in front; she had never had to ring the doorbell for him and was scared that his father would answer. Having never met him, Carrie didn't know what to expect.

Her bicycle rode smoothly over his newly paved driveway. She parked it up by the garage and, not seeing him anywhere in the front yard, proceeded into the back where she found him digging a hole in the ground by the side gate. His sandy hair was matted by the summer heat, his striped tank top soiled by dirt from his garden.

He heard her coming and glanced up at her through the green fencing. "Hi Carrie. Whatcha doing here?" he asked, continuing to dig.

Carrie let herself into the backyard and plopped herself down next to him. She punched him in the arm and said, "To give you that."

"Hey!" Ricky Anthony rubbed his arm. Then he smiled to let Carrie know that he was just joking.

When she told him about Michele's hair and how she looked like a dog, he laughed and said that he couldn't wait to see it. "Let's go over now," he suggested.

"No," Carrie said quickly---too quickly, she thought. She wanted it to be just the two of them. Michele sometimes got really bossy, and then he didn't pay as much attention to Carrie. "She's eating dinner."

Ricky Anthony scrunched up his nose, his freckles disappearing into wrinkles. "Already? I just had lunch!"

A furry caterpillar crawled out of the hole he was digging. Carrie cooed and picked it up, letting it crawl over her legs. They usually didn't talk that much. Their relationship consisted mostly of her and Michele chasing him around the yard, trying to kiss him. It was different with just her and him, though. Then she got an idea: "Ricky, do you want to come to my birthday party next Saturday?"

He seemed unsure at first, pushing dirt around with his stick. Carrie felt hurt, even though he hadn't spoke yet. She knew that he wouldn't want to come. Looking at the ground, he asked, "Who's all gonna be there?"

Carrie reeled off a list of her closest girl friends, most of whom she was sure Ricky Anthony didn't know.

"I know, like, *two* of those girls," he replied. He paused, then looked up at the side of his house. "I'll ask my dad, okay?"

Carrie stiffened a little at the mention of his father and just nodded at his suggestion. She thought that he could just show up at her house next week. She didn't even care if he brought a present. Why did he have to involve his dad in this decision?

She wondered how Ricky Anthony coped without a mom---Carrie was pretty sure that she had died---and how he could do everything he did with just his dad. Carrie knew that she would go crazy with grief if her mother died and she was left with just her dad. Maybe she could go live with her aunt, uncle, and cousin if that happened. Her father was not an easy man to live with. He seemed a lot more mean and easier to annoy lately. It was her mom who made life more bearable for Carrie.

She and Ricky Anthony sat in the same spot for the next forty-five minutes, digging the hole even deeper, and talking intermittently about school and people. When it was six o'clock, Carrie told him that she had to go home for dinner.

"Okay," he replied. She started to walk to where her bike was parked. He called after her, "You and Michele can stop by tomorrow, I guess."

"All right!" she called back and hopped on her bike.

Her father just stared at her from the other end of the kitchen table, looking as if he would literally explode. Carrie imagined the top of his head blowing off. She had to shake off the gruesome image.

"No," he said simply. "No, he isn't allowed to come."

"But Dad. . ."

"Yes, *really*, Carrie," her mother added. "How could you ask him without asking us first? He's going to be hurt when you tell him it's a girls-only party."

Carrie decided to try to be cute and said, "Well, if I don't tell him then he won't be hurt." She took a bite of her chicken and tried chewing it without appearing too nervous.

Her brother Paul snickered a little at her attempt at humor. "Yeah, but Carrie do you really want boy cooties at your party?" he asked. Barry glared at his younger brother, silently requesting that he should keep out of the conversation.

Her father seemed to ignore the distraction. "What are you going to do? Have him show up and *then* tell him?"

Carrie decided that her dad could be really stupid sometimes. "No *Dad*. I meant I wouldn't tell him because it'd be okay if he came."

Her father shook his head again, meaning "case closed." Carrie knew that her mother was more on her side, but she always backed her dad, probably because she was the one who had to deal with his complaints after Carrie went out to play.

"Besides, Carrie. Don't you think Ricky will be a little uncomfortable if he's the only boy?"

Carrie felt the need to protest, but she knew that she couldn't explain to her mom (and *no way* to her dad) that Ricky Anthony wasn't *really* a boy.

The rest of the week went unbearably slow, especially since she had to tell Ricky Anthony that he was uninvited to her party because of his sex. She had wanted to tell him the following day, but he was out, despite his invitation for her and Michele to come visit. She didn't have his phone number, either---he was unlisted---so she couldn't even call him.

Carrie saw him in front of his house a few days later. Her days in between had been busy with swimming and dancing lessons. They were in front of his house and Carrie thought that they might be going for a walk. The prospect of this excited her---she had never gone anywhere with Ricky except to Michele's house. Carrie took this opportunity to tell him about the party.

"Ricky, you remember the other day. . . , " she began to say, but just then two older boys came riding by, up onto the sidewalk next to her and Ricky Anthony, blocking their path.

"Hi, Ricky," one said. Carrie thought that his name was Kevin, but wasn't sure. He was Michele's brother Tommy's age and had jet black hair. "Having fun hanging out with the *girls*?"

Ricky Anthony looked at Carrie and shrugged. "I don't know." He shuffled his feet in the dirt. Carrie wasn't sure what Kevin meant so she kept quiet.

"Well, you should be," Kevin said, nudging the other guy. "We sure don't want a *faggot* like you hanging out with us." That word came out like spit and the two boys laughed heartily.

"Shut up, you jerks!" Carrie squealed, but Ricky Anthony just walked up back to his house. As the boys howled with laughter, yelling *sissy* as they rode away, she ran to catch up with him.

"Hey, you wanna walk over to Michele's?" Carrie asked. She hoped that the whole episode with Kevin hadn't phased him too much. His silence told her that it had.

She stood quietly next to him for a minute or so and then suggested that she'd see him tomorrow. He nodded and gave her a weak wave as she rode away.

Carrie knew what a *faggot* was. Her uncle was one because he liked other men. Her parents called it being "gay," though. Carrie loved her uncle---he was one of her favorite relatives---so she figured being gay couldn't be that bad. Sometimes she wondered if Ricky Anthony was gay since this wasn't the first time some older boys had ridden by and called him a *faggot*. She had figured he was just smart; while all the other boys were wasting valuable time teasing girls and pulling their hair, Ricky Anthony seemed to be getting a head start on dating (something her mother said she couldn't do until she was *sixteen*) by hanging out with girls so often.

As Carrie pulled into her own driveway, she realized that once again she had neglected to tell her friend about the party.

Saturday finally came. The day before had been a miserable day, the summer heat finally breaking into a thunderstorm, and Carrie had missed any opportunity of uninviting Ricky Anthony.

She wore a green top with a matching skirt, which she felt made her look older because it wasn't a dress; plus, she felt it accented her budding boobs. Her mother brushed and curled her long golden brown hair around her face, telling Carrie that her little girl was growing up. She gave Carrie a tight squeeze. When the two came out of Carrie's room, her father appeared. "Well, don't you look nice," he told her. He appeared uncomfortable as usual in his daughter's presence, shifting back and forth and looking mostly at her mother while he said it, instead of at Carrie.

Guests started arriving around two and were only expected to stay until five. They were all there by two-thirty, except for Ricky Anthony. Carrie was almost relieved that he wasn't there. Perhaps his father had said no.

It began as usual, with games and a water balloon toss in the backyard. Since the O'Hare's didn't have a pool, her mother set up a sprinkler for the girls to run through. Her brother Paul entertained her friends by chasing them back and forth through the water.

Barry and her father were grilling up some burgers for a late lunch when her dad went inside to get the buns. He came back out a few minutes later, but Carrie noticed that he didn't have the buns. He motioned for her to come, his long finger wagging at her. She walked briskly, trying not to make a scene, hoping her father would have the same courtesy. Last year he had yelled at her and made her cry at their Fourth of July party simply for spilling soda on a neighbor's blouse.

He leaned down to her level. "You have a visitor at the front door." Carrie began to ask who it was, but her father interrupted, grabbing her forearm tightly. "I thought Mommy and I told you that boy couldn't come."

"I know. I told him!" she lied. He would never find out the truth. She wrenched herself free from her father's grasp before he could say anymore and ran inside. Ricky Anthony hadn't come inside, thank God, but was standing on her porch.

"Hi," she said softly and opened the front screen door a little. Ricky smiled up at her, his arm extended. He had in his hand a red envelope.

"I'm sorry I'm late, but I had to go to my grandmother's." He looked anxious to come in, but Carrie knew she had to stop this.

She looked down at her white shoes and let it all out in one breath. "Ricky, I'm sorry, but my parents won't let me have boys at my party. I wanted to tell you sooner, but I didn't really see you this week."

He looked down, seeming utterly disappointed, and brought his arm back down to his side. "But I saw you the other day," he protested.

Carrie hated her parents for making her do this. "I know but, y'know, those boys... and you seemed upset... so I..." She let her sentence trail off.

He nodded, and said that he guessed he understood. He handed her the envelope. "What time is the party over?" he asked.

"Five," she replied and then realizing something, suddenly brightened. "Listen, maybe we can play together after the party before I have to eat dinner."

Ricky Anthony smiled. His dimples made Carrie smile even more. He said that sounded good and ran off her stoop and down the street, seeming anxious to have five o'clock hurry up and get there.

Carrie's father looked pleased when she came back alone. She told her father that *boy* merely wanted to drop off a birthday card for her.

"Oh, that was nice of him," her father said, turning back towards the grill. She even thought she saw him smile at Ricky Anthony's thoughtfulness.

It was difficult getting away from her party. Carrie finally convinced her parents that she was going to walk Michele home.

"Can I go see Ricky too?" Michele asked when Carrie started to cross the street without her. Michele's hair had calmed down in the past week, and Carrie had been happy to hear many girls compliment her on it at the party.

Carrie feigned thinking about it for a few seconds, then told Michele that she was only going to be there a couple of minutes and then had to go home for dinner. Michele seemed to have no problem with this explanation and ran off, yelling out "Happy Birthday" behind her.

Ricky Anthony was out on his front steps and appeared to be waiting for Carrie to come by. She was quite flattered. As she came up his front walk he asked her, "Are you allowed to walk up to the school?"

"Why?" she asked. She figured that she could get away with it if they weren't gone too long.

Leaning on his knees to get up, he replied, "Because that's where your present is."

Carrie wanted to tell him that it wasn't necessary, that his sweet card with the puppy dog on the front and his name scrawled inside was enough. Then again, it *was* her birthday and she was feeling greedy, as if the gluttony that had occurred at her party hadn't been enough. So she said okay.

They made their way to their old elementary school, Carrie carefully eyeing her brand new Mickey Mouse watch the whole time. The school had closed down when they were in first grade together, but it was nearby, so none of the neighborhood kids had ever forgotten about it.

The athletic field was empty----probably because the rain the day before had made it almost like a swamp. Carrie was glad that her mother had made her change back into shorts and sneakers.

Ricky Anthony led her over to the fence which divided the school property from the neighbor's house next door. It was tall and overgrown with bushes, but Carrie saw what Ricky was leading her to.

A favorite pastime during recess in first grade was trying to get this far back in the field, without a recess aide yelling at you, in order to go see the pussy willows. She wondered if he had done this as well, for she only knew Ricky Anthony by name back then. To them the area had seemed to be almost forbidden. Now there was no one around to stop them.

Carrie couldn't believe that after all these years there were still some growing. Ricky pulled one with many buds out of the ground. Carrie brought the pussy willow up to her face and rubbed the furry plant against her cheek.

Offering the stick to him, she said, "Feel. " He took the branch and did so against his face for only a moment, and then handed it back to her.

"I'm sorry you couldn't come to my party," Carrie told him. He nodded, seeming content, she thought, that he had gotten to spend at least some time with her on her birthday.

"What are you kids doing?" came a shriek from the other side of the fence. Ricky Anthony and Carrie looked at each other, totally shocked and confused, then realized that they had just upset the owner of the pussy willows. Without any hesitation, they broke into a run towards home.

It was eighth grade. Carrie sat at lunch with her current best friend Laura. They chatted about their test in math that day and about the cute boy who sat next to Laura in science.

Carrie was still friends with Michele, but she had a new best friend as well named Dawn, which was okay with Carrie. She could barely remember the times she and Michele had played chase with the boys and could barely distinguish her tenth birthday from any of the others that she had had.

Then Laura mentioned that she had heard Ricky Anthony was moving, only of course she didn't call him Ricky---it was just Rick now.

Carrie felt a horrible ache in her chest and looked over toward where he was sitting. He had grown out of his baby fat and now wore his hair rather long and was always brushing it out of his eyes. A permanent scowl seemed to be pasted to his face. She didn't like any of the boys at his table.

"Where to?" Carrie asked.

"Florida, I think." Laura seemed unaffected by all this, continuing to shovel fruit into her mouth.

Carrie wanted to say something to him, but she and Ricky Anthony (she would always think of him like that) hadn't spoken in years. As the lunch attendant told everyone that it was time to clean-up and get ready to go, Carrie decided to say good-bye to him anyway. She timed her departure with his as he got into the mob of people near her. Carrie stared him down, determined to at least smile at him. He looked her way, *right at her*, she thought, and she felt the corners of her mouth begin to twitch into a smile. But his eyes drifted slowly back toward the direction he was heading, the boys behind him pushing him and clowning around.

He had grabbed her arm and they had run, the sweet breeze lapping through her hair, the pussy willow grasped tightly in her hand. They stopped at the edge of the parking lot and, with their hands on their knees, breathed in deeply as if they hadn't done so in years. She told him that this had been better than her party could have ever been and Ricky Anthony smiled at her, the sunlight reflecting off his hair, making it golden.

The Painted Man

for Sean B.

You wear your heart
not quite on your sleeve
but tattooed all over your arms.
Each child assigned a name, a birthday, a symbol
as if you could
or would forget
the three dirty-blondes,
and the brunettes,
one with cornflower blue eyes, the other two with black.

It's like a memo to yourself—
to grab a loaf of bread after work
to pick up the boys from baseball
that family is permanence.
Immortality is instant as a Polaroid.

There's no escaping the father's prides and joys,
lying naked next to your wife,
because this is where
you have made this
together.

There's no way around this,
having your family tree
rooted in your pain,
inked across your veins;
warning boughs will break away,
cradles will fall.

But it's never senseless
to start again,
beginning with a caress
and ending in a sigh.

You keep a picture of her in your wallet,
first because of a milk-carton paranoia
and now just because.
You could
or would forget.

She's one day old here,
one day and can you believe the hair on her?
This is the one on my right bicep,
you say.
She's the only one with two dates,
buried under a button-down.

—*Natalie Bair*

The Women

One of us looks for a hotel room,
something with an ocean view,
hopes the winter hasn't eroded
the beach,
and pushed the silky sand
up against wooden piers.

One of us
watches out for her passport in the mail,
practices her French verbs,
imagines getting lost in the web of Paris.

Some of us put down clean sheets on narrow beds
and restock our birth control.

We long for falling in love again.
Seeking it out in the dusty corner of a strange room,
we are forced to huddle together
for warmth,
to combat the waiting.

One of us tries to swim off the waiting.
Kicking on her back,
she pretends to cross the ocean.
Imagines she can find him,
eyes wide-open,
on the smooth, blue, bottom of the pool.

—Jen Weikert



Mouse Opossum and Giant Grasshopper—A. Raymond Bossert, III

CONSTRUCTION

KATHLEEN SUCHECKI

"His knuckles boasted the deepest saturation of the color, and ...it made him feel like he'd done something bloated with irrationality or pride---like he'd squeezed a field mouse or, better yet, knocked Hal around for sleeping with his wife."

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation was digging up the street all morning---blundering bulldozer, steel claw of the backhoe screeched across torn asphalt, motors, burly workmen---but in the midst of the mid-morning noise, Doug somehow forgot himself. Darcy, his daughter, sat at the round wooden table in the kitchen, sucking air through a straw. She'd been up all night with stomach pains and was now clutching at Doug's arm for more juice. Simply exhausted, Doug wished that Karen were in the kitchen making her mushroom and tomato omelets. By this time Karen was probably at the day care, or even worse, at Hal's house in Catawissa.

When Doug thought about Hal and Karen, he almost needed to be by himself. Once, about three weeks ago, he saw Hal's car, a Bronco or something, at the Coastal Mart down by the Washies' playground. Doug wanted to go over and buy some ice or a Coke, just to get a look at him. Instead he sat in the parking lot of the playground in his car, listening to Bruce Springsteen. Hal really wasn't anything, just a guy with the seat of his jeans hanging against the back of his thighs---a guy with brown hair. When Hal turned around, Doug saw a rough face, reddened a little. *He looks like he beats women*, Doug thought. He knew it wasn't true, but at the time, the separation was too fresh, too unreal, for objective thoughts.

Doug thought about driving through town on his way to work; he might catch a glimpse of Karen's navy Plymouth. He imagined the look on his wife's face when she saw that Doug had shaved off his five year-old beard. Doug smiled. He wondered if she'd remember the days at the Hilltop Bar in Maudsley. Doug didn't believe that she'd be shocked at his bald face, but he thought some self-deluding would get him through the day. At first he feared that Darcy might have been afraid of him after he got rid of his beard. She'd never seen the small cleft in his chin or the full flush of his cheeks in winter. Instead of shrinking away from the strange, smooth-faced man, Darcy clung to him and insisted on rubbing his chin as if he were a genie. He assumed that she just wanted her mother.

At the kitchen table, Darcy latched onto a can of Aqua Net hairspray, something Doug's mother told him to use on the ink stains on his shirt pockets. After breakfast was cleaned up, Doug planned to drop Darcy at his mother's house behind the high school so he could go in to work for a while. In a daze, Doug looked down at his hands and saw that they were stained red, presumably from Kool Aid. His knuckles boasted the deepest saturation of the color, and in a way, it made him feel like he'd done something bloated with irrationality or pride---like he'd squeezed a field mouse or, better yet, knocked Hal around for sleeping with his wife. *She'd had the nerve to call, asking about Darcy. I swear.* Doug muttered some low curses and took the aerosol can from Darcy.

"Daddy," Darcy said in a matter of fact way that was much like her mother's. "I want some popcorn. With sweet on top." Since the beginning of the year, Darcy had often asked for out-of-the-ordinary foods. Some days it was almonds or pumpkin pie, other times it was caramel corn. She rarely jumped at having hot dogs or cookies that kids normally ate. Doug was still puzzled as to where she'd acquired a taste for such "adult" things.

He lifted the girl down from the chair and wiped her face with a washcloth. She gently pushed away the cloth, and Doug then brushed the crumbs off the table. "Nana will cook some for you. How 'bout you get some books together to take with you?" He was glad his daughter was with him. Doug loved the way she was so accommodating; she ate what he made, she gave up her bed sometimes to sleep next to him, and she left him without tears. For a four year-old, she didn't say much, either praise or complaint. Again, Doug felt guilty about missing so much of her daytime life, and again he tried to forget about it but couldn't. He was on the verge of completing a design for a filtration system for a new vaccine, and he was needed constantly at the plant. Doug often dropped Darcy at his mother's or at baby-sitter's. Twice he had to rely on Josie, his wife's older sister. Josie's house was a kid's heaven---lots of mess and sweet food---and Darcy was fascinated with Josie's brass, canopy bed. Darcy would come home telling Doug about jumping on the bed and twirling around the railings. Doug wasn't too fond of this, so he found a reason to stop the visits when he learned about about the foreign men who slept there.

"They're just travelers. Nothing's going on." Josie had sounded distracted when Doug had confronted her; she glided around her apartment, dusting off shelves and surfaces of furniture. "I put an ad in the paper to make some money, and they showed up. Why let that extra room go to waste?"

"God, this is nuts," Doug had said. "Who the hell advertises for houseguests?" He remembered the time after his and Karen's wedding when Josie, drunk, danced around the ballroom of the Genetti Hotel with her dress around her shoulders. A frilly pink girdle stuck to her small waist and she had on those ugly knee-high stockings. *Who'd wear them to a wedding, or worse, in a wedding? She really had nice legs, though.* He laughed out loud.

"What's so funny?" Josie stopped, clutching an empty flowerpot.

"I don't know." Doug smiled. "Just wait 'til your wedding, and your kids." He looked over at her. She'd given him the same expression that he had given Darcy this morning when she asked for caramel corn. Doug liked Josie, but he knew she never would be one to raise kids.

Doug got sick of replaying the guilt about baby-sitters over and over in his head. He decided to take Darcy to his mother's early to get his mind out of the house. Looking over at her, Doug chewed on the corner of his bottom lip. *Everything's so obvious.* He casually began fumbling in his pocket for his car keys. It was nearly nine-thirty, and the noise and the workmen outside had just halted for coffee. Doug turned to the back door, hoping to see his keys on the nearby table. Instead he saw Josie's long, camel-like face pressed up against the glass. Jiggling the door, she mouthed, "Hey Baldy" in reference to his face. She came in and began complaining about a shipment of exotic flowers from South Africa that hadn't arrived at her shop the day before.

Josie was so unlike Karen. While Karen's hair fell in tufted waves below her broad shoulders, Josie wore her thick, black hair in a blunt bob. Josie had glasses, and her

frame was long and thin. She wore lots of dark eye makeup, and Doug sometimes thought she could have passed for Coco Chanel or one of those bony, regal ladies of the 30's or 40's, except she was a terrible dresser. Karen would sometimes wear long, prairie-like skirts to the day care, but Josie rarely went out in anything but jeans and a sweatshirt. Maybe it was the dirt and water of her flower shop or just a result of being single. Her apartment was in Riverside, near the cargo airport, where a lot of couples lived. Planes rarely flew around there, so the kids used half of the airstrip, a large field, for soccer practice. Doug hoped to sign up Darcy one of these Saturdays, but something always came up.

Crossing her arms, Josie went into the living room to see Darcy, who was watching a loud TV show. Through the small threshold which separated the living room from the kitchen, Doug watched Josie squat down next to Darcy and pinch her arm. Karen's family had a thing with pinching; they called it "love squeezing." Whatever it was called, it made Darcy recoil from her aunt. Josie asked about kindergarten, and Darcy answered by asking if Josie was staying with her today.

After whispering something to Darcy, Josie left the room to join Doug in the kitchen. He quickly busied himself at the sink, so Josie wouldn't see that he was staring at her. She sat on a bar stool. "I see you've kept the place clean." Josie spun around on the stool. Her short, black hair flung out in a perfect circle around her head like the swings at Hersheypark that made Doug nauseous.

The spinning had distracted Doug from her question, and it took him a few seconds to answer a throaty "Yeah." He wondered why the cleanliness of the house surprised her; he'd always kept things pretty neat even when Karen was around. Maybe Josie only noticed things without Karen. Doug cleared his throat. "I was going to stop by your parents' today, you know, to drop off some of her clothes and stuff." He wiped a plate clean and started on a cup. "I guess you can find some of the stuff upstairs for her."

"OK." Josie stopped and leaned on her fist. Doug turned from her and watched a few robins bolt from a maple tree as a construction truck pulled into the street behind the yard. The side streets, including the one which ran parallel to Doug's backyard, were being revamped and repaved for the future houses at the end of the block. The whole project wouldn't be done 'til September, which meant four more months of rumbling mornings. Darcy had kindergarten at ten-thirty, and he'd told his mother to get her to school so he could go to work. His mother had been doing so much, even though at times it really wasn't enough. He thought about hiring one of the older mothers in the neighborhood but decided against it, for fear of unwanted pity or gossip.

The workers' break would be over soon and Doug tried to jam as much idle speech as he could into the remaining ten minutes of silence. He asked Josie about her car, the store---anything to get a word about Karen. As time dwindled, he felt ready to burst, but he caught his breath and coolly asked if she'd seen her.

Josie's shoulders slumped. "Yeah." With her thumb, she began flipping through a Burpee's catalog on the counter. "She was at mom's last night---with Hal. Hope you don't like petunias," she said, ripping out a page and folding it into a paper airplane. She smiled up at him and said that Karen was doing well, but her mom was not. "Mom's not good about the whole thing. She only let them sit in the kitchen."

"Oh." Doug stopped wiping the dishes. "And you?"

"Me? Well, I left before Mom poured their coffee. I thought she'd dump it all over them." Putting the glossy airplane on the counter, she tucked a clump of hair behind her ear and looked up at him. "She wants to see Darcy again tomorrow."

After a ten hour workday, Doug went to his mother's to pick up Darcy. There were three plates at the table, and with a large smile, his mother told him to sit down for pork chops. Darcy was already seated at the head of the table, so Doug felt pressured into staying. He had looked forward to stretching out in front of the sports channel with some popcorn after Darcy was fed and tucked in, but his father was fishing in Canada with a neighbor, and Doug hated thinking about his mother eating alone. After pushing Darcy's chair closer to the table, he kissed her head and helped himself to a slice of bread. "So, Dee Dee, how was school?"

"Good." Lately Doug found that Darcy was wedded to monosyllabic answers. She drank some apple juice and wiped her lips on her sleeve. "We made paper flowers, and mine is purple. I gave it to Nana. I set the table." Doug smiled as she gulped the rest of the juice. She said she wanted more.

Doug's mother responded by bringing a carton of milk to the table. "Sweetie, how about some milk?" Darcy scowled and demanded juice. Doug gave in while his mother said him that Darcy was growing, that she needs good bones. He poured her some juice, and his mother went back to the stove to turn the last greasy pork chop.

Doug brought the green beans and potatoes to the table and sat down. After the food was dished out, he ate quietly and finished the dinner in fifteen minutes. Thanking his mother, he stood up, apologized for the rush, and gathered Darcy's things. His mother still smiled through it all, as if her smile were an anchor for his well-being. From the front yard, he saw her pull back the gauzy curtain and wave.

Outside, Doug held Darcy's hand and glanced up at the forked moon. It was around eight, and the sky was a bruised mix of navy and burgundy. Darcy clutched a coloring book and markers under her free arm and began to cough. He asked, "Are you O. K.?"

"Yeah." She stopped hacking and waited at the curb for Doug to fish out his keys and unlock the door. The metal corner of the low Toyota scraped against the pavement. After he buckled his daughter in, he pulled on the door. It was firmly stuck against the high curb. "Watch your fingers," he grunted as he slammed his hip against the car door. The door finally gave and made a screech not unlike the noises which came from the construction vehicles at his house. He got into the driver's seat and drove home.

Later that evening at Darcy's urging, Doug called Josie to come over. Darcy wanted someone to draw a cat for her, and, frankly, Doug's cats looked like humped dinosaurs with triangles for ears. He figured he might as well call Josie, who was creative enough to own a flower shop. Normally, Doug wouldn't give in to such frivolous requests, but he felt like he owed Darcy something since he barely saw her today. Like any parent, he wanted his daughter to be well-adjusted, but more importantly, he wanted steady ground with Karen's family.

Josie waltzed in around eight-thirty and since it was Friday night, she brought her laundry. During the five and a half years that Doug and Karen had owned the house,

Josie had dragged her laundry over on the weekends because she didn't have a dryer. "The thing uses too much energy," she'd said. "It's not worth the trouble. Besides, line drying makes jeans too stiff." Doug didn't care that she came on weekends. If he ever wanted to go out, she could stay with Darcy.

After sorting her whites into a pile, Josie took the clothes to the basement. In a few minutes, she was back upstairs, whistling. She took a red marker and drew on a legal pad on the coffee table. Effortlessly, she drew a big Cheshire cat with a lopsided smile. Darcy giggled and began rattling off animals that she wanted Josie to draw. Around ten o'clock, they put Darcy to bed and in a half hour, Doug followed, leaving Josie to the plushy couch. "Just turn the lock before you leave." He heard shooting on the television, probably from a crime show.

Josie shook him violently, "Doug, wake up. I have to talk to you." "Oh shit," Doug mumbled. He looked out from a pillow and then squinted. "Josie? What's wrong? Where's Darcy?" The digital clock read 2:34 a. m. Sheets were tangled around his legs.

"Darcy's in bed." She whispered again that she needed to talk to him. "Please."

In the bare light, Josie looked like a strange fairy. She wore a long, lacy nightgown, and her hair was cleanly parted. Leaning onto the mattress, her breasts shook loosely, and a swatch of lace was the only thing that kept them from falling onto the comforter.

Doug abruptly sat up. "Jesus, what's wrong with you?" He mashed his eye with his palm as Josie pulled herself up from the bed. He couldn't believe she was coming on to him.

"I need to tell you something." She made no attempt to cover herself but stood up as if it were another sweaty weekday at the flower shop. "Come downstairs with me, so we don't wake her."

Unsteadily, Doug followed her into the kitchen. He didn't want to get into a discussion about this strange relationship and he was too tired to make sense of it. The late May night was warm, and he noticed that Josie had left the windows open behind the couch. A crumpled blanket lay on the coffee table, and the muted television was still on.

At the dark table, they sat, and Josie began giving Doug some boring details about her and Karen's teenage summer in Avalon. Doug couldn't figure out what was happening, either in the story or in real time. He thought that maybe this was a warm-up, something to wake him for the big talk. As she kept droning on about the boys they'd met---one with red hair, one with a scar on his chin--- Doug began to wonder if she were drunk or maybe sleepwalking.

"What is all this?" he finally asked. He left his mouth open, as if to suck in the night and her words---to understand it all. He tried to distinguish this vacation from all the others he'd heard about from Karen.

"Don't you see?" She stared at him like he was on a game show, and she was waiting for the right answer. "She's *not* on vacation."

"I'm going back to bed." Doug pushed himself away from the table. *Why did she stay here all night anyway?* He rubbed his chin, felt its stubble, and stood up. "You woke me up for this?"

"Wait." She reached for his elbow and missed it; she looked into his eyes. She got up and glided next to him. Doug thought she was going to kiss him, but Josie stopped and looked down. "Hal wasn't the first."

At her last word, Doug felt his hands fall loose, as if the muscles had dropped out of them. For a few seconds he kept his feet planted in two squares of linoleum, and then he turned to the back door. The chimes on the door knob rang as he opened it. Outside in the backyard, the night was quiet. He walked over to the crumbly, machine-strewn street and stared out into the unlit houses beyond the construction vehicles. Other than the moon, the only light was orange---from streetlamps---and it cut through the angled gaps of machinery in choppy trapezoids. Everything seemed to be muddy---the ground, the house, the truck wheels. Doug felt he should get the garden hose to wash everything off, to pull off the caked dirt, but then he remembered that water made mud.

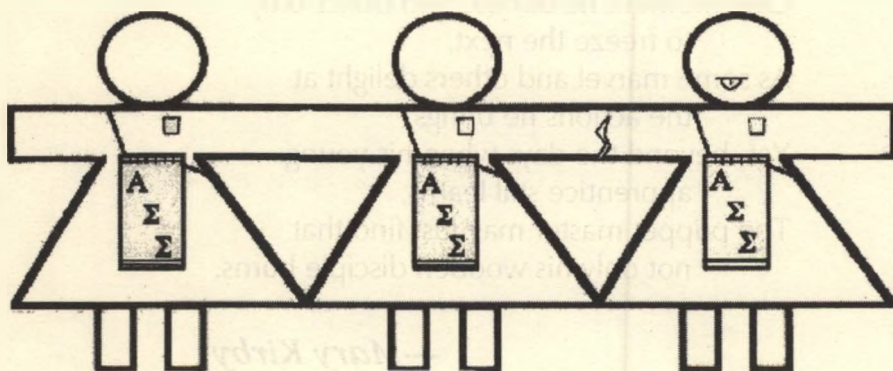
Josie came to Doug and touched his shoulder. "I can help you." Her voice was soft and almost breathless, like a cat licking a human's salty skin.

"I know," Doug sighed and walked over to the pronged backhoe that was nearly on his property. With his bare foot, he kicked clods of dirt from the shovel's teeth. He thought about Karen barging into the house tomorrow, wanting to see his daughter. She'd sail in, a dutiful mother, bringing un-refusable gifts of dolls, necklaces, dresses. She would tell Darcy how much she missed her, and all Doug would be able to do is smile. With a blank stare, Doug climbed into the cool, vinyl seat of the backhoe's cab, ready to take off.

Untitled

every carbon copy
kitten
who walks my way
challenges me
to pull out
my imaginary
machine green
gun
and blow
their bland banter
away

—*Natalia Beylis*





Pinocchio's Inferno

The skilled and wrinkled hands maneuver
the shiny, smooth cross with ease.
Bringing the wooden puppet to life beneath
the nearly invisible strings.
One moment he dances and frolics only
to freeze the next,
As some marvel and others delight at
the actions he brings.
Yet, beyond the days when his young
apprentice still learns,
The puppet master may just find that
not only his wooden disciple burns.

—*Mary Kirby*



Man's Reach Should Exceed his Grasp?—Jason Adamo

The Absence of Stories

The women of my history
emerge as a perfect set
of lack-luster storytellers.
Crushed by the fast flicker
of the present,
they donate no time
to looking back.

My mother shuts herself up
about the day she had me.
My aunt hides the remnants
of her first marriage.
My grandmother forgets
about the weekend she
stayed at the Waldorf-Astoria.

None of them
talk about the babies
that fell from their womb
when it was too early.

Never implanted,
their oral tradition slips out of me.
Their woman tales dissipate
like a blanket of shower steam.

Around our kitchen table,
stories are replaced
by loud instructions,
dripping in glottals and gossip.

The past,
like the tissue paper bodies
of unknown aunts,
ill-figured cousins,
even a sister,
is miscarried,
collectively drained out
and quieted.

---Jen Weikert

CREAM AND SUGAR

KRISTEN MCGONIGLE

"But something drew them together and kept them together. From the first day he walked into the bakery she felt a connection to him."

The sky is so dark at 6 a. m. It is hard for Jenna to believe that the day has started as she awakens to the same darkness that put her to sleep. She would love to wake up with the sun on her face, but the sooner she gets to work, the sooner she gets out. Mornings in March are so cold that it takes great effort for her to leave the warmth of her bed. The alarm goes off at five, she hits snooze once, then it goes off again. The second alarm is final. She knows that the time has come for her to get up and the sooner she gets in motion, the better she will feel. Jenna brushes her teeth, thinking about the hot water in the shower and how good it will feel. Her whole body is tired, and she slowly rinses the toothpaste out of her mouth as if in slow motion. She rubs her face and eyes, trying to wipe the sleep away. She takes off her nightgown and underwear and tosses them into the large hamper her mother placed against the other wall of the bathroom. Her nakedness is strange and uncomfortable in the morning; Jenna feels big and sluggish. When she gets into the shower, she runs the water immediately. She stands under the stream and feels its discomfoting coldness. As it gets warmer and ultimately steaming hot, she lets it soak her body, warming her down to her bones while cleansing her for a day at work. She lets out a deep yawn and is now wide awake.

Every day, after she gets out of the shower, Jenna turns on the lamp in her pink room and then the radio. She puts on her makeup, eyeliner, mascara, and foundation while still in her robe with her hair covered in a towel. She sings along with the radio, and if an especially good song comes on, she turns it up. When she walks to the dresser, to pick out an outfit for work, she sees her clothes from last night piled on the floor. Jenna notices that her jeans from last night are dirty on the seat and down the back of the legs--- probably from stretching out in the back of Lee's truck. She reminds herself to wash them as soon as she comes home from work. There is no sense in putting them in the laundry then having to explain to her mother why they're so dirty.

Jenna has to wear white clothes to work because she works in a bakery. They have no uniforms---just a white T-shirt, pair of white jeans or sweatpants, and a pink gingham apron with the name of the bakery on the front. She wore her white jeans yesterday, so today she'll wear a pair of sweatpants along with her white sweatshirt. After she picks out her clothes, she blowdries her shoulder-length, blonde hair and turns on the curling iron to curl her bangs. Lee loved her hair last night because she scrunched it to make it was wavy. He kept smelling it as he kissed her neck, because the smell of the hairspray was so strong.

Jenna works from six a. m. until one in the afternoon. She has worked in the bakery since she graduated from high school ten months ago. She works full-time, six days a week and has so far earned a fifty-cent raise and medical and dental benefits. On especially cold mornings, she often wishes she had studied more in high school, but she realizes she would have had to get a job at some point. Most of the people she

graduated with stayed in Riverside, and the ones who had gone away to school had always talked about finally getting out. She didn't care though. She knew a lot of people in Riverside and figured that anywhere she might go would end up like her small town, where everyone knows everyone else's business. Besides, she found a job that would pay her to stand around and wait on people, and the only thing she had to do was wake up early. It's also the place where she met Lee, and she can't complain about that.

After Jenna gets dressed and is ready to go, she descends the stairs of her house and picks up her freshly-washed apron in the laundry room next to the kitchen. On days when she's not in a hurry, she makes herself some flavored coffee, but today she figures she'll get some at work. She picks up her purse, puts on her jacket, and walks out the front door to her 1986 Mustang. She had bought it used, with help from her father, after working three months at the bakery. She drives to work and arrives shortly, because it is only a few blocks and one traffic light from her house. As she pulls up to the curb across the street from the bakery, she notices that the other ladies she works with have already arrived. The early morning regulars are slowly piling in, and Jenna reminds herself that in about an hour Lee will arrive for his daily visit.

Jenna's duties at the bakery include making coffee, refilling the product cases, and waiting on customers. She has worked there so steadily for the past couple of months that everything is now routine. After she enters the bakery and greets everyone, she clocks in and puts on her apron. She then makes herself a cup of coffee and adds a lot of cream and two spoonfuls of sugar. First, she takes a sip, then blows into the cup, then takes a deep gulp. Jenna walks into the back of the bakery to check on the loaves of bread. It is six-fifteen, and they haven't been put out yet. She approaches the smaller oven to the left of the back of the bakery and lowers the small door. On the revolving shelves, she sees several different pans containing round cream bread and rectangular cinnamon-raisin bread. They are slowly rotating; when they pass by Jenna, they are still a very light brown, far from being fully baked. She stares at them rotating in the black pans. She watches the dough slowly rise, getting softer and smoother until it ultimately becomes a deep brown. She watches the loaves as they become something, a thickness born of many materials in a lumpy batter.

Since she cannot prepare the bread for sale, Jenna returns to the front of the store to wait on customers. She picks up her cup of coffee and looks up at the clock. It is now six-thirty. Lee usually comes in now or by seven at the latest. Jenna thinks that Lee is the most attractive man she's ever known. He stops by the bakery on his way to work every day---that's how they met. He walks in and says "Hi" to the ladies Jenna works with, then stands at the back of the store and waits for Jenna to be free. When she is finished waiting on a customer, she goes to the coffee machine and prepares a cup of coffee for Lee, complete with cream and sugar. She puts a lid on the steaming cup then walks to where Lee is standing and hands it to him.

Lee is the most attractive man in Jenna's opinion because he is so simple. He is always honest with her and never makes promises he does not intend to keep. She always gets what she expects from Lee. His consistency can be depended on. When he comes into the bakery at seven in the morning, he is usually wearing the same thing---

either green work pants or jeans with a sweatshirt and a baseball cap with the name of the marina he owns embroidered on the top. His blonde hair peeks out the back and is often wet from his morning shower. When Jenna approaches him with his coffee, she gets close enough to him to smell the heavy aroma of laundry detergent coming from his clothes. He smiles and hands her two quarters for his coffee and smiles. When the morning light shines through the windows in the front of the store, Jenna notices the lines on Lee's face and the crow's feet that form near his eyes when he smiles. His eyes are bright blue, and Jenna can tell when he's tired because his normally ruddy face looks pale.

After Lee has paid for his coffee, he takes a sip and says, "Ah, perfect." They don't really talk much while he's in the store; all the women in the bakery know Lee and would pick up on their relationship if he stayed around to talk to her. Then they would whisper behind her back about how Jenna throws herself at Lee and how a thirty-five year-old man is expected to act when a nineteen year-old girl is hanging all over him. Jenna knows they wouldn't understand their relationship, and she knows that if they start talking about her and Lee, then everyone will know, and Lee's wife will find out.

The clock is moving very slowly now, and the crowd in the store is beginning to thin out. As Jenna fills the Danish case, she notices the sun creeping out and the sky getting brighter. One of Jenna's favorite perks from working in the bakery is taking the leftovers home at the end of the day. She usually packs a dozen assorted Danish for her family and a half dozen custard donuts for Lee. She remembers one night when she met him down by the river and watched him eat all six. He came right after work and hadn't eaten all day. He looked like a little kid as he polished off the last one, with custard on the edges of his mouth and his eyes all lit up in enjoyment of the treat. It was those nights at the river that made Jenna realize she was in love with Lee. They would lie in the back of his truck on mats that Lee had brought from the marina. They would sit on the mats because of the large ridges on the floor of the truck's back. The first night they spent in the truck there were no mats, and Jenna winced with discomfort every time she would move. They sat there for hours, and the next day her backside was sore from sitting on the ridges for so long. The next time they were in the truck, Lee had brought two long mats that were once boat seat coverings, but were discarded by people who dock their boats at the marina. Jenna was so touched that Lee had been so thoughtful. But Lee cared that she was uncomfortable, and he made an effort to make her feel better. She thinks about that gesture constantly.

It was on those nights when their conversation had turned from the latest gossip to discussions about the future. They would lie in the back of the truck and talk about the perfect house and what their kids would look like. Jenna would say that no matter what sex the first baby was, she would want to name it Lee. She would say how she wanted a daughter though--- a little girl with blonde hair and Lee's blue eyes. She always wondered why Lee never had any children with his wife. Jenna thought that it was because his wife was a few years older than Lee. Maybe she couldn't have children. Maybe they couldn't afford a family because Lee's wife didn't work. She always wondered but never asked. On those nights by the river, it was as if Lee's wife did not exist. It was just the two of them, and no one else mattered. They would make love as the sky grew darker then kiss and depart to their regular worlds. Lee was more special to Jenna than any boy she ever dated in high school. He was strong but soft and would

make love to her with the ease of a man, not the discomfort of a teenager. He did not make empty promises he could not keep, unlike the boys she knew who said they would love her forever then never returned her phone calls. She knew she couldn't have Lee right now; he was not hers to keep just yet.

But something drew them together and kept them together. From the first day he walked into the bakery, she felt a connection to him. When she waited on him, he asked her if she was new. She smiled and said yes and served him his coffee with flirty giggles. "Well, it's good to see that they're getting some new blood into this old place," he said and took a sip of his coffee. "And she makes good coffee, too. I may have to steal you away from this place to come work for me."

As he said his goodbyes and walked out the door, Jenna could feel a rush of excitement. The other women said, "That Lee is such a hunk," or "What a flirt he is!"

One morning, after Lee walked out the door, the manager Rita, said "Jenna, I think Lee's got eyes for you and Jenna smiled. "It's a shame he's married though."

Lee's marriage didn't stop Jenna from flirting with him; nor stop him from flirting back. She feigned an interest in boats to get Lee's attention. Jenna would find herself in long conversations with him until one of the ladies would give her a look which said get back to work. One day, he came in and offered to show her around the marina since she liked boats so much. She took him up on the offer. While on the boat, they got closer and Jenna's adrenaline began to rush. She could feel pangs in her stomach and legs, a tingling she gets when she knows something's going to happen. She told Lee that she thought he was attractive, and he looked her seriously, then took her right hand in his. Lee told her that he was never so attracted to another woman besides his wife, and he finds himself thinking about her a lot during the day. He smiled, scratched his head, and said, "So what are we supposed to do about that?" And then she kissed him. She kissed him because she wanted to so badly and because if he pulled away then, she would know it was wrong. She kissed him because if nothing ever happened after that day, she did not want him to feel guilty for the rest of his life knowing that he had kissed another woman. But they were both satisfied, and from that day on, they would sneak around to see each other on a regular basis. They had been doing it for almost five months and nothing had changed. They had only grown closer.

Jenna begins to feel tired while standing around the store. The rush of customers is gone, and when the downtime hits, she begins to feel the morning. She quietly listens to the conversations of the other ladies who work in the bakery. They talk about their husbands, their kids, and grocery bills. They discuss carnivals and parades, and Jenna wonders if she will become one of them--- a contented woman who lives through the excitement of small town life. Jenna wonders if one day she will have a small ranch house with simple furniture and white walls. She imagines herself doing laundry, grocery shopping, and holding babies. She knows someday she'll have it---everything she's imagined while daydreaming in class or while laying in a tiny bed in teddy bear pajamas. She knows it will be there when she's ready. That's the one thing that frightens her about her relationship with Lee--- she's afraid that one day he may really want her. Perhaps one day it won't be exciting anymore, and he'll leave his wife for Jenna because he is truly in love with her. Jenna is not sure what she would

do if the situation were ever to arise. She knows that right now she gets nervous when she is getting ready to meet him. She is anxious when she's in her room, primping for her date. She gets excited almost to the point of shaking when she knows he will enter the bakery any minute, and she gets a pain in her stomach when he leaves, especially if she doesn't know if she'll see him later. Jenna thinks about Lee all the time. When she's at work, at home, at the mall, and in the bathroom, she is always wondering where he is and what he is doing. When she's lying in bed at night, she fights to keep the image of Lee and his wife in their bed out of her mind. She smiles incessantly for the few minutes when he's in the bakery every day. She's overwhelmed with feelings for him, but she doesn't know how long they will last. Right now Jenna thinks she would rather have nights in the truck than anything else in the world.

It's a quarter to seven when Jenna looks at the clock again. Business is slow, so she decides to check on the bread that has been taken out of the oven and is cooling on a rack. She stands over the rack with her hand on a loaf. It is still warm under the thick, dark brown crust. Jenna leaves her hand on it for a few seconds, enjoying its warmth and sweet smell. It is still too warm to slice and bag so she'll refill the donut case instead.

Jenna rolls a rack of filled donut pans to the front of the store and leans it against the wall opposite the donut case. She takes the empty pans out of the case and piles them onto the counter next to the rack. As she begins to refill the case with the pans full of donuts, Jenna notices that the coffee in both pots is low so she'll have to make a fresh pot for Lee. When she looks at the clock again, it's five of seven so she goes to the coffee machine. First she empties the old filter into a bucket, then prepares a new one, then opens a prepackaged bag of ground coffee. She washes out one of the pots with the lowest level of coffee, replaces the filter, and puts the pot in place. With the flick of a switch she begins the brewing process. As she turns around, she notices Lee's truck pull up against the curb in front of the bakery. She goes back to filling the donut case, raising pans of crullers over her head and into place, feeling the usual rush in her body.

"Hello everyone," Lee says as he walks through the door. He is wearing his cap and a thick, dark green jacket and jeans. Jenna turns around and smiles at him. Rita, approaches him first and asks him something about buying raffle tickets from his wife. Jenna begins to prepare his cup with two tablespoons of cream and a teaspoon of sugar. She walks over to where Lee, who is standing at his usual place near the windows.

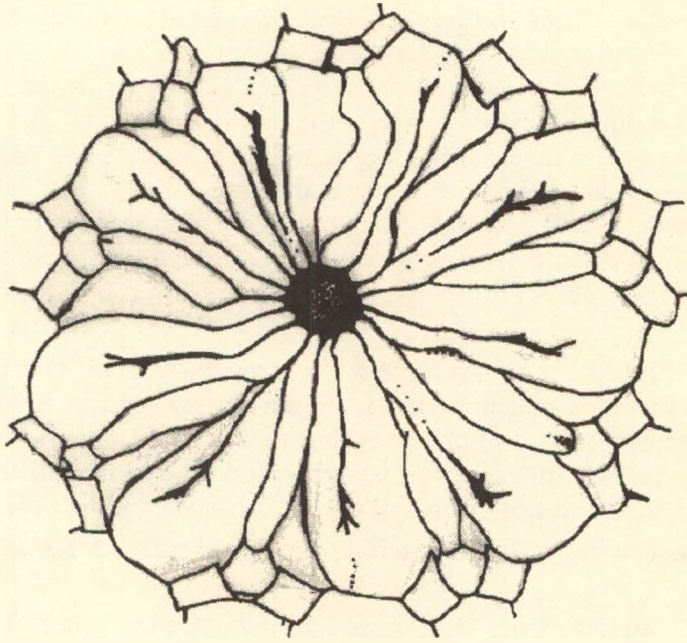
"I just made a fresh pot," she tells him. He is smiling at her and nods for her to come closer.

"I had a blast last night," he whispers to her, "Can you meet me tonight around seven-thirty?"

"Sure," Jenna says while looking around to see if anyone is watching them. She turns to the counter to prepare the coffee that has just finished brewing. Jenna pours it into the cup, still thinking about meeting Lee. As she stirs it to a creamy brown, she realizes that she's never met Lee two nights in a row before. She puts on the lid and walks back to Lee.

"I've got something really important to tell you," he whispers, leaning toward her. He hands her two quarters and takes a sip from the cup. "Ah, perfect."

Jenna watches Lee open the door and look back at her with a wink. She stands there for a few seconds, holding the quarters as the sun begins to shine through the windows. Then she walks to the cash register, rings up a coffee and drops the two quarters into their black plastic slot. She is still thinking about what Lee will tell her. Jenna goes back to the donut case and begins raising the pans onto their shelves again. The sun rushes in, getting brighter and brighter. She pulls a pan of powdered cream off the rack and elevates it. Powder falls from the rack into her hair and onto her face and apron. She replaces the pan on its shelf and brushes the powder off her face and hair. Jenna looks down at her apron and with both her hands dusts the powder off the front of her body.



That Man Stan

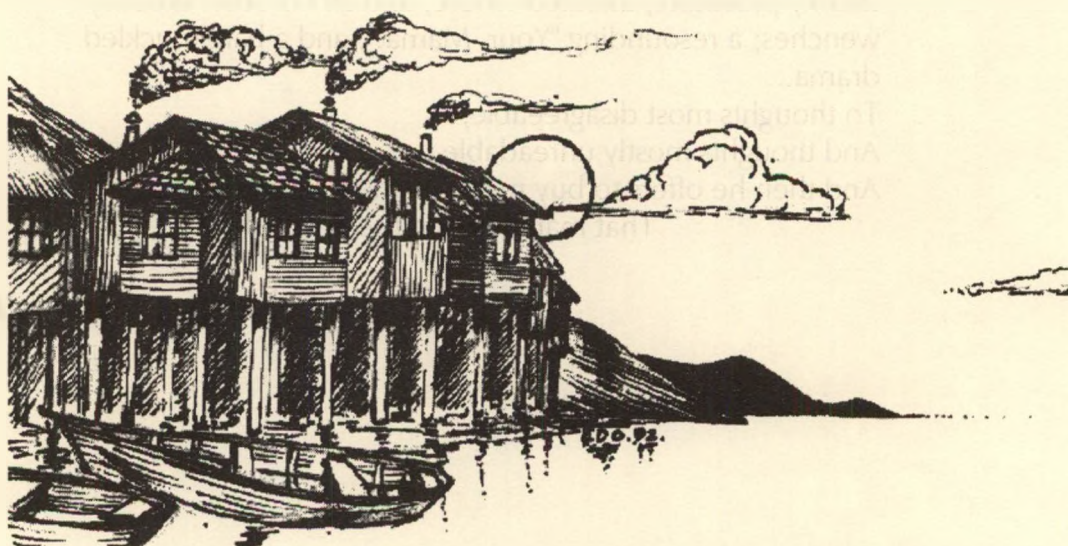
Nobody gets my goat like that man Stan
With his abrasive tongue that I just can't stand.
His jokes run like sandpaper and
Require more patience than I have at hand.
His words dig and scratch beneath my skin,
And I wriggle and itch when I speak with him
My neck stiff;
My hair lifts;
And all in all, I'm pretty miffed.
And then his discourse, in all its remission,
Sets my mind to associative ruminations
Of angry men and global demolition,
Rabid hounds, vicious cats, pernicious old ladies, and diseased
rats;
two scantily clad sumus, to large women in tutus; with nail
scratches on
a chalkboard, while getting gored by drooling tusked boars;
Hoover vacuums, suction cups, alligators that eat doggy-eyed
pups, a cockroach
in my 7-Up, really gross-looking upchuck; worms, germs, and
tough midterms, insects that sting, and things that squirm;
drunken knife-throwers and pot-bellied bowlers, scalding hot
water and long-winded collect-callers; mustached-girls, squishy
kisses from Aunt Irma, not to mention mushroom clouds, lynching
crowds, *Apocalypse Now*, anthraxed cows, slit wrists, candle-
sticks, lead pipes, poison, rope, revolvers, knives and wrenches; a
skanky prostitute, infected whore, and all his other skeevey
wenches; a resounding "Your, Mama!", and a bareknuckled
drama...
To thoughts most disagreeable,
And thoughts mostly unreadable...
And then he offers to buy me a drink...
That man Stan ain't so bad, I think.

—A. Raymond Bossert, III

sea isle

december wind touched
her red face as she
traveled through this desolate summer town—
no longer was the beach
bustling with bathing beauties
aiming for that perfect tan or
children being buried in
summer's golden sand—
it was she alone—
winter's wandering spirit
searching for peace
in the empty darkness
of december's night.
she embraced those sands
with the gaiety of
a child—one
without the contamination
of her world's reality.
this water was
the rejuvenation
of her battered soul.

—*Susan Chernesky*



THE RE-ENCHANTMENT

CARRIE LISA

The Powamu, one of the Arizona Hopi tribe's most sacred ceremonies, has a two-fold purpose: to embrace the arrival of spring with a blessing on the year's crop and to initiate the tribe's children into the Powamu and katchina Societies. While the "crop blessing" is of primary importance and occurs every year, this rite of passage for Hopi children (occurring every four years) allows them to be involved in other religious ceremonies. Until the end of the initiation, the children believe the physical katchinas who initiated them are the actual katchina gods who have come from the San Francisco mountains. After the ceremony, when the katchinas remove their masks and the children see that they are not gods, but actually other members of the tribe, the children often feel humiliated and disenchanted with the adults of the Hopi tribe.

As I sit on the porch of my tiny wooden house on the rez, I remember my youth and the day we were initiated into the Powamu society. My brother John, Ellie, Ben the Youngheart, and me. I am Shiamptiwa, which means "Flowers Budding," but everyone called me Sarah when I was young. We are of the Hopi tribe, and John and I are Snake Clan. It was a day much like this---the air crisp and dry, the sun high in the eastern sky (where grandma and grandpa walk), the land flat and brown, the wind blowing strong and cold. That was our last year on the rez before we were sent to the *bahana* (white) school. I ran away, but John wouldn't come home with me. That's a whole other story, though. It was on that special day that I started to learn why we were Hopi.

Our mothers had cut our hair a week before. It was short and ugly, and our faces looked like skeletons without our braids. I hated the way the elders stared at us, and I wanted to cut my mother's hair so she would see what it felt like. The village elders looked at us with knowing eyes and stern faces. We knew. Excitement and butterfly-bellies made us wiggle. We knew that after today our place in the tribe would be different. The preparations for the Powamu were being madem, and those of us children who were chosen would not know what was to happen until the time was right. But we knew it was sacred and special and scary and important. We were the youngest---Ben and me. We were nine. We didn't say anything---just waited and tried not to be full of nerves. Our ceremonial parents came to the *kivas* to fetch us when it was time. Gerald Thunder Cloud and Lily Open Arm were mine.

We learned much that day---the ways of the elders and the traditions of the people. We saw Tcowilano, the ancient *katchina*, and the Powamu chief told us

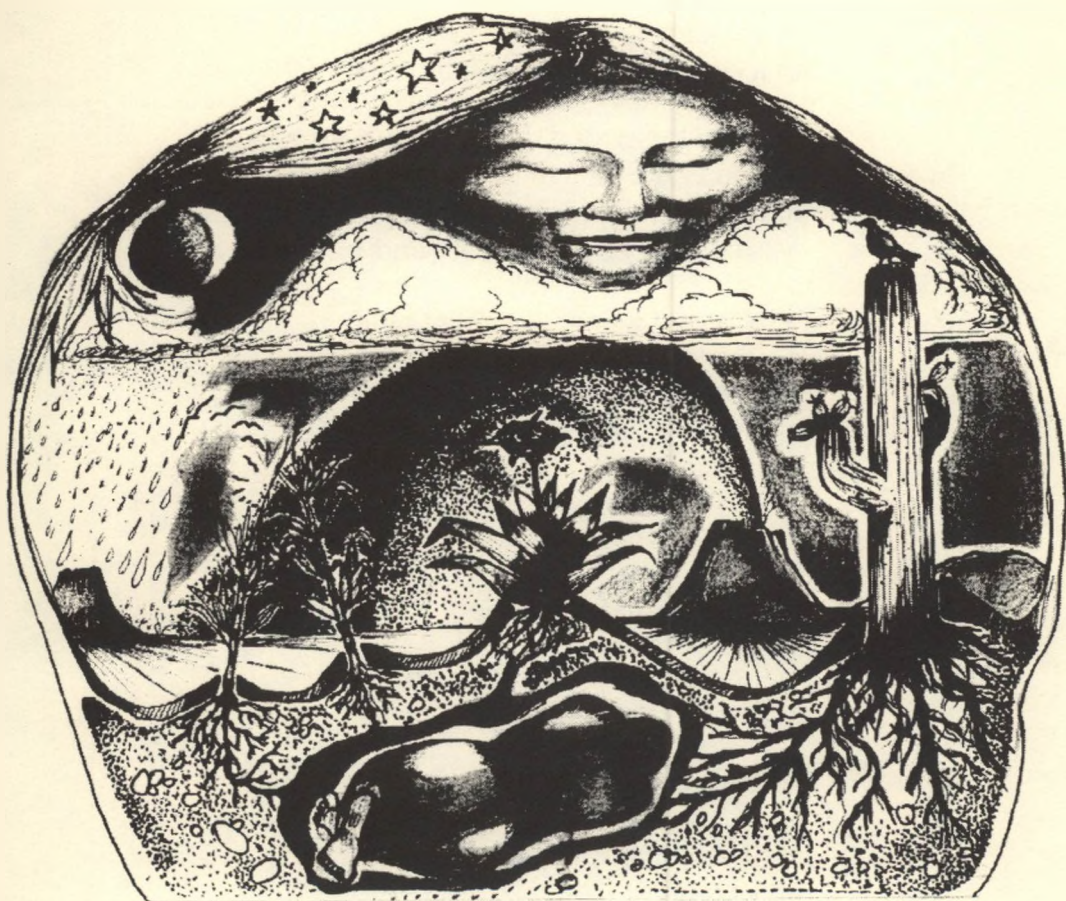
that we would later sprinkle the *katchinas* with cornmeal and that everything we would see must be kept secret, even from our parents and other family members. We swore secrecy, for fear of angry *katchinas* coming to get us. We learned secret rites that we could never discuss and things that my mind, clouded with age, cannot remember. All were scared, and I felt alive with pleasure and fear because of my responsibility to the tribe. I did not know if I could keep the secret. The next day, we were brought into the *kiva* again with other children with their bony and nervous faces. We stood in silence and watched the other children being whipped and being given sacred rites. I got angry at the *katchinas* whipping those naked little boys---my cousin Roger included. I wanted to yell at them and make them stop; they had no mercy. I was also glad that I was not involved in this ceremony. We were once again told to keep the ritual a secret but I wanted to tell Magey so bad what had happened to her brother.

On the ninth day of the Powamu ritual my ceremonial father gave me a gift of yucca strips and bean sprouts, and I also received a *katchina* doll. I was happy with the affection and care Gerald Thunder Cloud gave me. In the afternoon, we feasted on bean sprout and corn stew; it was warm and delicious. Later the bogey *katchina* scared me and John and the other children and that made me change my mind about telling Magey. Even if she were my cousin. All the initiated children anxiously awaited the night, because we would watch our first night *katchina* dance. As we sat on the east side of the circle, we drew our knees up to our chests in the sacred manner and stayed perfectly stil, I even when the *katchinas* called us to the *kiva* to eat, for our ceremonial parents had warned us that it was wrong to move from our spots. We soon found out that the *katchinas* who had accompanied our initiation were not truly the immortal gods and goddesses from the San Francisco Mountains, but were our families and other members of the community. We were all in shock. Some of us cried that night in our sleeplessness---what did this mean? We were to be grown up now. They told us that we were part of the Society, that now we could participate in the ceremonies and dances. I was so angry, and I felt hatred toward the adults of the tribe for fooling me and making me believe that the elder next door was a *katchina*. I wished I had never been initiated, because I didn't want to be a grown up and fool little children. It wasn't so bad after we thought about it, but in those first few hours after we found out we cursed the elders and our mothers and the *katchina* actors in our heads. It is only now in my age that I can appreciate the sacred nature of what happened that day. I became a valuable part of my society, and I learned the ways of the ancients.

Yesterday, Magey asked me to be Walter's ceremonial mother for the upcoming Powamu. I thought for a long time before I answered her---I remembered how confused and angry I was after the Powamu had ended. But I also remembered that those feelings had passed, and I soon felt the warmth of community

and that I was special because I was chosen to learn the old ways. The past is what keeps us alive, so of course I said yes. I must uphold my responsibility to my tribe.

So much has happened in the last 39 years. I am back at Walpi and am an elder now. John died in one of the *bahana* wars, and my parents have long since traveled to the east. My husband followed three years ago and my children live in Phoenix. They have jobs and do really well. They always ask me to come live with them, to leave the rez, but I can't. I still have a responsibility to my tribe and I must perform my duties as a ceremonial mother and teacher for those of us who still believe in the ceremonies and haven't gone to the big cities and kneeled to the cross on the wall they call Christianity.



Tierra Madre Vida—Eduardo A. Villegas

The Giving Tree

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die.'"

Genesis 3:4

She had nothing else to offer
but a smile and overripe fruit,
lots of rot like that.
"My apple is your apple, dear"

and so she kept on giving in.

The name of the masked creator
never known or shown
to a couple of kids who may

be from the wrong side of the tracks.
It didn't take long to find out
the line in the pines
was now called a boundary and

they were naked. It was her fault—
the white kitten was quite blameless
and shameless when he
pointed the finger, pleading his case.

The open meadow closed for repairs.
Flowers cried when teddy bears died.
Western expansion
postponed and dethroned. The promise

of limitlessness was a vacuum,
now a Hoover or Eureka;
a Dirt Devil must
have taken hold and strangled her

in his boa-constricting way.
This Manifest Destiny was
a lie, he sighed, and
he would be sucked off but not in.

She had nothing else to offer
but a smile and the prophesy
of two more apples
that didn't fall far from the tree.

The Creator set them up in
a two-bedroom in the suburbs;
picked them up and kicked them
outside the white picket fence

of Eden. She made sure the gate
didn't hit them on the way out.

It was her nature
to give and please, give and please again.

—*Natalie Bair*



The Milkmaid

to Jan Vermeer

The little I know about you is from her—
your moral view, the light
of your God, I see it in the use of woman,
the broken bread, the fall
of milk in fine helix strand.

This maid wears no pearl, no earth-
glory, but you still must have looked
up at her, in awe, with a child's wet
lashy eyes. Did you envy
her, the breadth of her matron
nourishment, her balance of the froth,
the curd, even the strength of her meaty
forearm, floured white with sunlight?

The milkmaid, yellow and blue,
(how can one simply name your colors?)
steadies the belly of the jug,
guides the spout to the bowl.
She must have gently lifted
the udder this way, as if to ease
the milk from the old cow, like the mother
steadies a young daughter's freshly
washed head, and squeezes water
out of the long, wet locks. Surely

your milkmaid must have looked
up once, to shoo you out, to blush
or flash
a ruddy peasant smile. No,

knowing you, your light, the goodness
flowing, radiating
from this woman, she must have never
noticed you, never
stopped pouring.

—*Kathleen Suchecki*

150 CANDLES

A. RAYMOND BOSSERT, III

Cast of Characters:

Annie

Pete

Andy

Paul

Spotlight center. A middle-aged woman stands with a book in her hands. She is dressed in black. Her name is Annie.

Annie: Bullfinch's Mythology: Castor and Pollux were the offspring of Leda and the Swan, under which disguise Jupiter had concealed himself. Leda gave birth to an egg from which sprang the twins. . . . They were united by the warmest affection and inseparable in all their enterprises. They accompanied the Argonautic expedition. . . . [Afterwards], we find Castor and Pollux engaged in a war with Idas and Lynceus. Castor was slain, and Pollux, inconsolable for the loss of his brother, besought Jupiter to be permitted to give his own life in ransom for him. Jupiter consented so far as to allow the two brothers to enjoy the boon of life alternately, passing one day under the earth and the next in the heavenly abodes. According to another form of the story the brothers were placed in the sky becoming the constellation Gemini.

Exit.

Blackout. The light is dim, for a twilight effect. No spotlights should be used. Two figures are visible on a porch, fields should be hinted to in the background. A door into the house is to the left. One fellow is sitting in an old wooden rocker, to stage right. This is Peter, a man aged beyond his years whose vigor is belied by an ancient form. He is dressed like a classic American farmer. Further right from him is Andrew, a much younger-looking fellow dressed in a white suit and a black tie. His youthful appearance is in stark contrast to his poise and manner.

Pete: . . . and boy was it a whuppin' to remember.

Andy: I remember.

Pete: We took quite a lickin'.

Andy: You more than I.

Pete: And when those Hoffer boys had their fill, and we came home to Mom, I thought she was going to kill us.

Andy: Your clothes were a mess.

Pete: She was furious!

Andy: Blood stains fast.

Pete: She wanted to knock heads around!

Andy (*thoughtfully*): And I think the knocking around of heads was the true origin of her displeasure.

Pete: But we showed those Hoffer boys who not to mess with, didn't we? They may have nicked us up, but we really pummeled them!

Andy (*curiously*): That is not exactly how I recall the incident.

Pete: Well, they may have gotten a punch or two in on us . . . but we cleaned their clocks! Didn't we?

Andy (*very matter-of-factly*): No. . . I don't . . . don't believe so. I remember seeing them double up on you, knock you down, and beat you successively until you finally gave in and started to . . .

Pete: No. . . no. . . that's not at all how. . . I mean, I remember. . . but. . . Are you sure?

Andy: I was there, remember?

Pete: But I at least had them bloodied up before they took me down. . .

Andy: Not with their blood.

Pete: We at least put up a decent fight . . . right?

Andy quietly shakes his head "no."

Pete (*rationalizing*): Damn bullies. Who did they think they were anyway. . . Bunch of cowards, that's all bullies are.

Andy: Everybody has their own problems.

Pete: Which is not an excuse for beating up little kids. And look where all their bullying led them---miserable, jobless lives.

Andy: Actually, the younger Hoffer has a partnership with a New York law firm, and the older Hoffer owns a chain of sporting good stores.

Pete: Hmmph. . . well, rich people are never happy with their money. They're greedy, horde it up and never think a bit about the poor and homeless.

Andy: Not always. The older Hoffer just opened up an orphanage for children of teenage mothers and the younger Hoffer annually donates a hundred thousand dollars to cancer research. . .

Pete: Oh.

Annie enters. She is nearing forty, noticeably older than Andy but much younger-looking than Pete, and wearing a formal black dress. Behind her is a boy, her son (who should be shorter than Andrew), approximately the age of Andy but dressed much more casually, carrying a stack of presents and a bakery box.

Pete: Well, remember the time when Pop drove us out to Green Lake and. . .

Annie: Uncle Pete! Happy Birthday!

Pete: Annie! Paul! What's this?

Annie and Paul step onto the porch greeting Pete. Neither acknowledge Andrew who looks away distractedly.

Paul: It's your birthday, Uncle Pete. We're throwing you a party.

Annie: Paul, put those boxes in the house. You be careful with that cake now.

Paul exits directly. Annie walks up to Pete, who is still sitting, and throws her arms around his neck, kissing him on the cheek. He displays an ornery disliking for the affection.

Annie: I made your favorite---chocolate with vanilla icing.

Pete: I'm liking it already. How's your mother?

Annie straightens, making sure she hasn't wrinkled anything.

Annie: She didn't make it. . .

Pete: Oh.

Annie: Well. . . I mean. . . she didn't make it today. They say she should be getting better once they start the chemo again. . .

Pete: Oh. . .

Pete starts to get up, but is stopped while still hunched over.

Annie: No, no. You stay there. I'm going inside with Paul, and we'll fix things up proper for a party.

Pete sits.

Pete: O. K. Well, I'll just stay here then.

Annie exits, pausing at the open door to look at Pete and reacts as if she suddenly has seen something crawling on him, but realizes it is only a shadow.

Andy: Pete, I. . .

Pete: Damn it.

Andy: You. . .

Pete: She didn't make it.

Andy: We have. . .

Pete: No. . .

Andy: Something is the matter with you. . .

Pete: Nothing is the matter with me. Just get away from me.

A rooster crows.

Pete: Remember when we were little, and we used to go crawling through the fields with our toy rifles and pretend like we were fighting in World War II. I was always losing you when those cornstalks were all ripe. And Mom used to holler out to us that we'd get run over by a tractor or something.

Andy: Pete, do you recall the date of your birthday?

Pete: Why, it's today!

Andy: What I meant was the year.

Pete: Oh . . . uhm . . . nineteen- twenty.

Andy: The Second World War was waged in the 1940's.

Pete: World War I then?

Andy (*chuckling*): I believe perhaps you are correct with regards to the Second World War.

Pete: But . . .

Andy: Now try to recall. Where were you when you were nineteen?

Pete: I was . . . not here. . . I was in Europe.

Andy: You were fighting German soldiers along the outskirts of Aachen.

Pete: I was in the fields. . .

Andy: You heard the sound of an engine. . .

Pete: It wasn't a tractor. Tractors don't have treads. . . I couldn't find you.

Andy: I was alongside of you through it all.

Pete: No. . . I couldn't find you. I thought you were gone. You left me. Those treads. . .

Andy: I was there.

Pete: But I couldn't. . .

Andy: And now you are here.

Pete: Now we are here. It's all coming back to me now. Oh, God, it was awful. . . death. . . to hear the cries. . . to see all that death. . . the dead bodies. I mean. . . to see them. . . to touch them. . . smell them. . . Jesus, you could almost taste 'em.

Andy: Perhaps some things are better left to fancy than memory.

Pete: Dying men. . . dying children. . . dying babies. . . dying. . . dying. . . dying. . .

Andy: All must break under entropy's rod.

Pete: Yet, I made it out alive. . .

Paul steps into doorway.

Paul: Mom's making dinner, Uncle Pete. What do you want?

Pete: Oh. . . I suppose. . . whatever.

Paul: You know she ain't going to take that for an answer.

Pete: Yeah. . . I've got some hot dogs in the freezer. Tell her to boil those.

Paul: O. K.

Paul exits.

Pete: Good kid. He'll be a big help in the harvest. They say it's going to be a good one this year.

Andy: It shall prove very profitable.

Pete: You'll be down here in time to lend a hand, won't you? Paul's a strong fella, but I ain't exactly what I used to be, and he'll need someone else for all that haulin'.

Andy: I shall be here to assist Paul.

Pete: Thanks, Andy. You know, we'd be pretty lost without you.

Andy: The pleasure is mine.

Pete: Heh. . . I was just thinking about the time when the two of us were a nervous wreck that whole night when Annie was in labor with Paul. Why, I even remember the look on her face when that little tyke came out all bloodied like a. . .

Darken porch. Lights come up on inside of Pete's kitchen.

Paul (*entering*): He said to boil hot dogs.

Annie (*putting candles on the cake*): O. K. Get them out.

Paul (*opening freezer*): Look at all this junk in here. How can he eat this stuff?

Annie: Well, Uncle Pete has never been one to worry about his health. Leave them on the counter to thaw.

Paul (*looking out door*): Mom, there's something I want to ask you.

Annie: What is it?

Paul (*stealing icing off cake*): Well. . .

Annie: Don't do that, Paul.

Paul: Sorry. What I wanted to know was. . . well. . . who's Andy?

Annie (*looking up from candles*): Andy. . .

Paul: Yeah. A while ago Uncle Pete mentioned him to me, but wouldn't say who he was, just that he helps him out a lot.

Annie: Yes, well people around here are very friendly. He's probably just a neighbor.

Paul: No, I don't think so. I mean you'd think we'd have run into him for all the times Uncle Pete says he's around. Actually, Uncle Pete kind of frightened me the way he spoke about him. . . I mean he knew an awful lot.

Annie: Yes, well, Paul, Uncle Pete is getting old.

Paul: You don't think he's. . .

Annie: Now, Uncle Pete always had an very active and vivid imagination. Your grandmother used to tell me how Uncle Pete had an imaginary friend as a child. I think his name was Andy.

Paul: You don't think Uncle Pete's nuts do you?

Annie (*laughing*): Honey, if Uncle Pete was insane, the army would have given him a Section Eight long before he was run over by a German tank. And I'd hardly say he's any stranger now. He's always been slightly. . . eccentric.

Paul: Like the candles?

Annie: Like the candles.

Paul: Has he always insisted on all those candles?

Annie: According to Grandma, he's been insisting on having twice as many candles every year since he learned to speak. Fortunately, since his eyesight has been getting worse I've been able to get away with fewer than that. (*steps back shaking her head*) How in the world I would fit a hundred and fifty candles on this cake. I have no idea.

Paul (*looking at candles*): Maybe Andy is more than just Uncle Pete's imaginary friend?

Annie: I wouldn't worry about it, dear. Get me a pot to boil those hot dogs and stop tasting the icing. You can have a piece of cake soon enough.

Darken kitchen. Lights come up on inside of Pete's porch.

Pete: Paul's got so much to look forward to. He's got a whole life of choices to make. And it's great to see how he's growing. It's like being young again when I see him, like all the opportunities I had all come back. . . like being born again.

Andy: You should be grateful you were even born once, but if you were born again, would you still be where you are now?

Pete: I don't know, Andy. . . I was awfully scared.

Andy: Fear is a powerful counter-impetus.

Pete: Paul doesn't seem so frightened, though. He'll marry and have children. He won't turn tail when the time comes. You know, I often wonder why I couldn't have married.

Andy: I notice that you speak as though your bachelorhood is a mistake.

Pete: It's easy to be lonely when you're this old, Andy. . . I mean I have you, and Paul and Annie. . . but to have a wife and children is different.

Andy: But different is not always better, Peter.

Pete: I don't know, Andy. . . did I make the right choices?

Andy: Why question what you should have done, Peter? Let the past bury it's dead. . . Be here now and do here now.

Pete: But what must I be, Andy? What do I have to do now? I'm so old. . . and so tired. Tell me, Andy.

Andy: I can not say. You have to figure it out on your own now.

Pete: But how will I know if I'm right.

Andy: You just have to trust me, Peter.

Pete (*chuckling*): Stumped you, eh? Hey, remember. . .

Andy: Peter, what I really came to tell you. . .

Pete (*irritated*): Now, now. . . this one I remember exactly.

Andy: I am sure you do, but this is very important.

Pete: O. K. What is it?

Andy: As much as I have done for you through the years, there are limits to my. . .

Pete (*interrupting*): Remember ol' Tray?

Andy: Yes, Peter. But I really must insist. . .

Pete: What kind of dog was he?

Andy: You are changing the subject.

Pete: Don't you remember?

Andy: He was a sheepdog.

Pete (*laughing in glory*): He was a German shepherd! I gotcha!

Andy: Peter, this is the last time I can come down like this. . .

Pete (*stands, hunched over*): What?!

Andy: I know you will find this difficult to understand, but I. . .

Pete: No! No! No! Why do you always have to be so damned straight! Hell, you were even a stiff in the womb! (*Very long pause. Lights dim.*) I'm sorry, Andy, I didn't mean it like that. . .

Andy: We can no longer do this. . .

Pete: But you said. . . what about Paul and the harvest? You promised!

Andy: And I meant it. I'll be here for Paul. It's you I can't. . .

Pete: Get the hell out of here! I can't see you!

Andy: Pete, look at me!

A rooster crows. Pete sits. Andy waits. He seems to take notice of something beyond the porch. He follows it with his eyes.

Andy: Pete. . . Pete listen to me.

Pete: Annie, is dinner almost ready?

Andy (*from inside*): Things will be done in a minute, Uncle Pete.

Andy: Do not be like this, Peter. It is imperative that you. . .

Andy follows whatever he sees as it moves towards the porch.

Andy: No, not now. . . not yet. . .

Pete: Andy? Andy?

Andy: Yes, Peter?

Pete: Not again, Andy. . . you're not going again? He can't take you, Andy!
No. . . I won't let him. . . I'm sorry, Andy. . . I didn't mean it. You'll stay, won't you?

Andy: I shall remain Peter. I am not going anywhere.

Pete: But then. . .

Andy: Just another moment. . . just one more. . . that is all I ask. . . just enough time to go in the house and. . .

Pete: Andy. . . Andy. . . who are you talking to?

Andy: Peter, there is not much time. You have to listen to me. Go inside your house and. . .

Pete: He ain't here for you, is he?

Andy: Tell them how much you love them. . . while you still have a moment.

Pete: No.

A rooster crows.

Andy: Peter, you do not understand. I can not stop what is about to happen. I have no power over it this time. Peter, do something! Anything! Pray if you will, but do something!

Pete: No use fighting what you can't see.

Pete folds his arms.

Pete: I hope they remembered to put your candles on the cake. It's your birthday, too.

Andy: Please, he does not understand. Leave him go until he does. Please. . . Peter. . . Peter . . . Peter.

Pete collapses in the chair. Lighting increases and then suddenly stops. Paul comes out and sees his dead uncle. Andy moves over and puts his hands on Paul's shoulders from behind.

Caramia and the Monster

Three steps away from mediocrity, Caramia turns to the monster and asks why it stands three steps away. The monster jumps closer and squeals with grotesque laughter against a painted, grey, backdrop sky while Caramia lingers amid trees patched with cardboard and green birds hanging by their *papier-mache* bodies.

The hush of childhood with its swollen roots tangles itself around Caramia's 20 inch waist. The monster has chosen the wrong girl, not quite the construction of perfection. Caramia's madness has become muffled with a history of ghoulish cackles through years of sun-drenched summers which autumn spends trying to forget.

Every black hair departing her scalp tells a queer tale of insignificance. Her not-quite Barbie body battling the Barbie-like demands on her mind.

Winters brought pale sighs as twice a week the monster would watch from behind cracked glass while Caramia stalked her villainous sanity, dressed in designer black leather with silk trimmings.

Nothing came with spring.

Not once in 18 years.

But the monster still found itself offering to be her savior.

Childhood wrapped itself tighter and tighter as in the shadows Caramia stood, clear blood running from her scorched pores.

And then it stopped.

One night she fell on the ground for no reason. With her legs bent at strange angles underneath her mutating body, cracking childhood's rosy facade and pulling herself into the light. The monster turned to crawl in Caramia's footsteps but she could not contain his remorse, and the way in which he transcended into the daytime light was eerie and strange. Sleep overcame Caramia, and the monster began to diminish into a pit. As she slipped into slumbers, she could feel nothing save a cold tongue lapping at her feet, between her toes, while the all-too-familiar pain came accompanied by a loud crunch.

As the monster departed into the attic of Caramia's mind.

---*Natalia Beylis*

The underwater life

The moon sat in the highest branches
of the bare tree that stood in front of our house.
A branch tapped an ice-shot tip against my window,
keeping me wide eyed.

There was no sleep.
A man with red hands stole it from me. From all of us.
In the year after the murder, every house on the block
changed hands, except ours. My father stayed, saying "If
they come to get you, there's nothing you can do about it."
Bad advice to a small child in a creaky house. I came to live
inside myself, underwater, in a sea that could only be reached
by falling down a well.

The dark sea was slow and rich.
My eyes and pulse adjusted
to the demands of underwater living.
I came to fluency without breath,
swimming through the dark days,
pacing myself to the tempo
of a cold, glass drum.

—Charles Spruance

"The whole time he kept his right hand on her knee, lacing his fingers underneath the frayed strings that spanned the hole of her jeans. He felt rebellious and incredibly sane."

Richard listened. He never hung up first. When he heard a click and a dial tone, he put the phone back on the wall heavily and crossed the floor to make a pot of coffee.

It was Reni who had called. The phone had started to ring as Richard fumbled with his house key on the front steps in the rain. He was just coming home from the Tripscot airport, where he had worked in the control booth and the concession stand. The place had one runway.

The door banged against the wall when he pushed it open. He darted across the kitchen, holding his umbrella and the mail in one hand, and grabbed the phone. "Dad, I'm homesick for you" were the first things she had said. Richard thought it was a strange sentiment.

He put his things down on the rocking chair slowly and said, "Me too, Ren."

"I got a dog. The lady said she's a yellow lab."

"What?" He pictured Reni when she was fourteen, before she lost her sight, standing on the neighbor's couch and gritting her teeth whenever their terrier trotted through the room and tried to sniff her.

"I met a boy whose uncle used to live in Tripscot. He's really nice. We went down to the dog place together. A lot of kids here have them. You'll love her. Her name's Libby. She just graduated from the dog program. Very affectionate, the lady said. You and Mom used to have a dog, right? Before me?"

"Yes, we did." Richard thought of the black fur. The thing looked like a huge mop without a pole. For the three years, it shared the house with him and Paula. Each of Richard's shirts was a testament to the fact that he had adopted a hairy black dog. "That's great, Reni. She'll be good for you," he said.

"I'm going to take karate lessons." Reni's voice on the other end sounded both triumphant and timid.

He switched the phone to his other hand as he shook off his wet jacket. "Karate lessons?" He felt nervous. "What kind of school is this? Does Libby get to wear a gi, too?"

"Dad, I have to go. Mom's at work?"

"Yes," Richard said. "I'm going to pick her up at six. We'll call you back then, OK?"

Paula worked at the Bottoms Up Pub, the most popular choice for Tripscot's after-work drinking and pool crowds. Richard went there on occasion with the local pilots when he was younger, before Paula got a job there. These were always careful excursions in which he enjoyed the company of his companions, but was wary of the women and men he did not know. Most of the Pub's customers were looking to bloody their fists, or stare someone down from across a pool table, or rub against them in the parking lot out back. The place had nothing on its brick walls. A chandelier made of deer antlers hung over the bar.

When the coffee maker stopped its hissing and gurgling, he poured some, then picked up the phone again, and sat at the kitchen table. He dialed the Pub and waited while they got her, dipping his mustache into the depths of his mug as he took a gulp.

"Reni called," he said when she picked up.

"What?"

Richard repeated himself, this time louder. He imagined her crouched behind the bar, the receiver pressed tight against her cheek. He could hear beer mugs clanking together in the background, the aggressive edge of drunken male voices, and every so often a roaring belly laugh rising above it all. He could hear some female customers bellowing out the words to a ZZ Top song. He pictured them slinking around the pool table, singing wildly into their cues---positive that they looked sexier than sex itself.

"Listen Richard," Paula was shouting. "I'm slammed. You still pickin me up at six? We'll talk then."

"Yup," said Richard, and took another big gulp of his coffee.

"I'm sorry. I'm busy, you know?" Paula shouted again. "Is Reni OK?"

Richard nodded yes as if Paula could see him. On the other end of the phone he heard male voices chanting, "Pau-la. Pau-la." They must have been sitting right behind her at the bar. A stray voice yelled, "Paula! A round of beers, babydoll!"

Richard combed his mustache with his fingertips, annoyed, and hoped she was wearing her T-shirt that said, "Richard's Wife," the letters stretched tautly over her breasts.

"I'll see you at six." He knew she didn't like her job as much as she used to. But she was good at faking it, apparently, because Tripscot had voted her Maine's Favorite Bartender two years in a row.

Before Paula hung up the phone, he heard the chanting men start to clap and holler, "Yeah!" Then a click and a dial tone. He sat with his thumb pressed on the small white button.

He tipped his mug, and a string of coffee sludge tickled his upper lip. He glanced up at the coffee pot. There was enough for one more cup. He decided to leave it for her.

Two days ago, he, Paula, and Reni had driven six hours to a special boarding school in the Catskills, where she had gotten a scholarship. All three of them sat in the front seat. Everything she owned was packed tightly behind them in square and round mounds that jiggled against each other the whole trip.

Paula took her camera because she wanted to take pictures of the campus and of Reni, but also because the odometer on their avocado-colored station wagon was going to flip to 100,000 miles.

They missed it. They were driving through New Hampshire when Reni said, "Hey----did you forget about the odometer?" They were three miles late. But Paula leaned over and took a picture anyway, and then she kissed the silver door lock that stuck out in front of the side window like a little finger.

"I love this car," Paula said.

"One thing I don't miss is having to look at the wooden panels. Looked like a closet on wheels," Reni said. She had lost her sight when she was sixteen. It had taken two years. She had often told them that the little, cloudy stripes on the edges of her vision had gotten thicker and thicker until they crowded everything out.

Richard grabbed a pen from the table and started tracing a figure eight over and over on his napkin. He wondered how Reni felt when she heard a camera shutter click. She had never said anything about it, but somehow he felt guilty. He told himself he should say something to Paula when he picked her up.

When Reni was in junior high, she asked for atlases and maps for her birthday and for Christmas. By eighth grade, the fake wood panels in her bedroom were covered with maps of continents and countries and states.

Richard thought about the Sunday mornings in the summer, when they would sit at the table on the deck. He and Paula would alternate sections of the paper while Reni sat across from them with an atlas. She would pick the name of a town listed in the columns beside the map and run her fingers along the grids to find the square the town was in. She read about the populations of each country, announcing to them the languages they spoke there, the religions, the currencies. Often she would look up and ask them, "How do you picture Bora Bora?" or, "How do you think the people in Finland look?" And then she would take a sip of her orange juice and watch them, waiting to talk about it.

Paula's parents lived in Concord, and when they went to visit, Reni took charge of the maps. She had the trip-tics, regional maps, road maps, and tourist literature all in a little canvas bag, organized into bunches with jumbo paper clips. From the back seat, she navigated, calling out estimated times of arrival, names of diners that could be potential pit stops, and occasionally she read aloud the settlement history of certain areas. Richard and Paula would sneak glances at each other in the front seat, partly amused, partly amazed, and listen to the excited voice behind them endlessly dictating over the rustling of folding and unfolding maps.

Richard slumped in the vinyl chair, still doodling on the napkin. His fat, red, figure eight reminded him of all the tissues he would see in the bathroom wastebasket with Paula's lipstick blots on them. Some of the lip marks were cherry red; others were more of a purple color. When he went to the bathroom, he would look at the lips and think that several women had been primping in front of his mirror. Somehow the thought always made him feel uncomfortable and sexy, even though he knew the blots all belonged to his wife.

Paula was oddly attractive. Richard had always thought that if an artist painted her nude likeness on a ceiling in an old church in Europe, it would fit right in with the other women painted there. Her hips were wide, and she had the same soft, white arms and fine hair as the women in the pictures in his tenth-grade Humanities textbook.

That is where he'd met her. She sat across from him in the circle in the classroom, and he remembered thumbing through the pages while his teacher spoke. When he came across a glossy reproduction of a painting of a tall, nude woman, he would cover up the face and picture Paula's in its place---her lips and pointy chin. Then he would look up at her, sitting across from him with her long legs folded Indian style on her chair. He would squirm in his seat and shut the book.

He decided when he was in high school that if he ever kissed Paula, he would probably never want to kiss anyone else, ever.

And he hadn't. He had asked Paula to marry him at her graduation party. He'd slept over that night. They had woken up at dawn. He'd put his pickup in neutral and rolled it out of the driveway and around the corner from her house. They'd giggled and hushed each other all the way. They drove to Caribou---two hours through the chill and mist of an early May morning. The whole time, he kept his right hand on her knee, lacing his fingers underneath the frayed strings that spanned the hole in her jeans. He felt rebellious and incredibly sane.

After they'd gotten married, they'd driven to New Brunswick. On the edge of a campground, they'd found a motel called Cuddle-Me Cabins. It was one of those places that rented out private cabins with fire places. They'd had to stumble down a pine needle-covered path in the middle of the night with raccoons staring at them to get the communal out-house. That's where they'd honeymooned.

Richard realized that there was a pink stain on the table from the red ink bleeding through the napkin. He stood up, spit on the table top, and rubbed with his thumb until it disappeared.

He looked at his watch and planned to leave the house in forty minutes to pick up Paula. He went upstairs to Reni's room, and after fumbling around in the closet for a minute, he found all of her maps. When Reni had learned about her disease, she'd peeled them off her walls, folded them, and stuck them inside her hard-cover atlas.

Richard cradled them in his arms as if they were the last maps on earth. He walked down the hall to the kitchen and knelt on the floor. He picked up the first map, unfolded it, and spread it out on the tiles. With his palm, he smoothed out the ridges where it had been folded until it lay as flat as he could get it.

Then he took the next map and did the same thing, repeating the process until he had six of them flattened out around him, green and blue and yellow and brown. He sat down in the middle of them, his legs folded.

He thought about his job. The maps he looked at there were under a scratched, clouded, plastic top, and were not as colorful or as vast as these.

Richard studied the one to his left, a map of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. He knew the Catskills were in the eastern part of the state, but he didn't know exactly where. He started at the top, and found a town called Rooser's Point, and put his pinkie on it because he liked the name.

Then he heard the kitchen door creak and close. Paula stood in the doorway, the water dripping from the edges of her green coat. For a moment they both looked at each other as if to say, What are you doing? She spoke first. "Lyn came in early, so Kate and I left. She gave me a ride."

Richard always thought she looked her prettiest when she was damp. Not soaking wet like in some shower sex fantasy, but damp, just as she was then, with little beads of water making webs in her straight hair; her cheeks and lips ruddy. Her collar bone was dotted with water, and it heaved up and down just slightly. He figured she'd run from the car to the house. Her coat was unzipped and he could see the letters on her T-shirt: "ARD'S," then a space, and then a "W." He smiled.

"Whatcha doin'?" asked Paula.

"I was looking for Reni," he said, his pinkie still planted on Rooser's Point. She didn't say anything. She stood there raising her eyebrows and smiling. Richard kept talking. "She got a dog. She's taking karate lessons."

Paula nodded, still smiling. Richard watched her survey the room---the soaked mail on the rocking chair, the coffee in the pot, the stack of maps beside him, and those spread out to cover the whole kitchen floor.

She struggled with her wet coat and tossed it and her tan pocketbook on the floor. With her sneaker, she parted the maps six inches or so, making a little path that revealed the yellow and white tiles. Carefully, she walked over to where Richard was sitting in middle of the room and sat in front of him. She wrapped her legs around him and then her arms and pulled her body up onto his lap. They sat for a moment with their foreheads and noses pressed together. Paula's eyes were closed, and Richard eventually shut his too. Then she put one hand on the back of his head and ran the thumb of her other hand along his mustache. And then she kissed him on the mouth, hard, for a long time.



Aboriginal Waits—Lorraine Healy

philly

realizing we're too far south,
we see the street sign proudly
reading american avenue.

our founding fathers graced
these very grounds preaching
life, liberty, and happiness—

now those chimes
of freedom are
almost silent.

traffic is loud—
sirens are blaring—
children are crying—

a little girl runs
through the alley.
her shoes are old,
the coat belongs to a
past season—
this is the only world
she'll ever know—
and I am helpless—

we hear horse hoofs
on cobblestone—a
historic breeze blows
through the hair of
happy tourists—

take a picture—
remember all
that was witnessed—

life, liberty, and happiness



—Susan Chernesky

Protons

Gail Ramshaw

Bert Streib

Michael Kerlin

E.J.Nolan, Sr.

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